OCTAVIO PAZ Who Reads Poetry?

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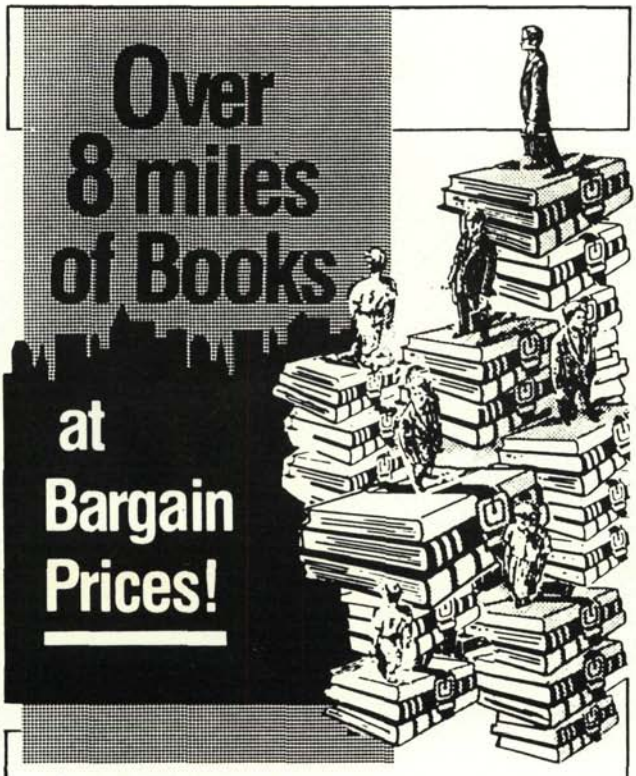

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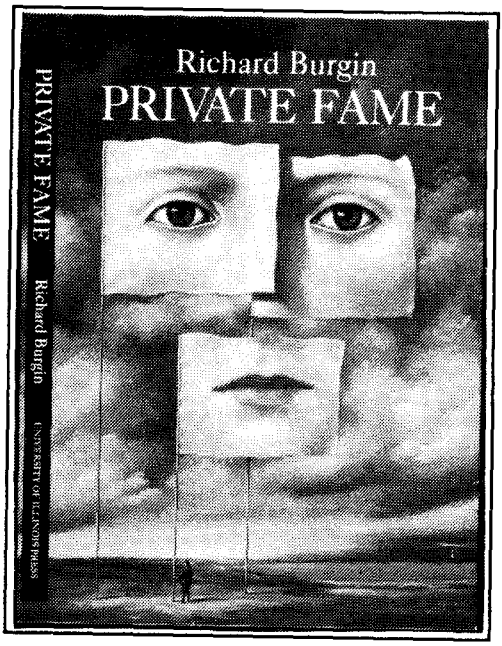

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OCTAVIO PAZ

Who Reads Poetry?

This reflection began with a question divided into two parts. The first was quantitative: How many readers of poems are there? As we have seen, this numerical part of the question by itself is meaningless. The number of readers varies with different societies and periods, and varies within each period; it varies even for the same poet. The esoteric, unreadable Eliot, read by a clique of eccentrics in 1920, in 1940 becomes Bishop Eliot, who is listened to worshipfully by multitudes. *How many?*, to make sense, must be considered together with the second part of the question: *Who?* What sort of people read books of poems? The *Who?* includes the *How many?* Or, rather, it dilutes it, so that the number ceases to be a number. The question *Who?* implies, first, a plurality of places: Where, the country, the city? And it introduces the dimension of time: When, which century, what year? And finally, the where and when are related to social class, political and religious affiliation, and an economy, a culture. The where and when turn into a history. The nature of the public that reads or listens to poems is a historical question. An awesomely large subject, and one impossible to explore in an essay of this type. But it is altogether possible to point out certain ideas, to outline some sort of hypothesis. My aim here is more modest: to offer a few suggestions and conjectures, in the hope that they will prompt someone to write, in the not too distant future, a study of the state of poetry as the twentieth century draws to a close.

I begin at the very beginning, with Homer, who is the origin of Greece and therefore of our poetry. His great poems, his heroes, and his moral code were the aesthetic and ethical archetypes for Greeks and Romans. In a manner of speaking, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were the Bible and Vedas of the Hellenes. Children and adolescents, as they learned arithmetic or exercised at the gymnasium, also recited the ancient hexameters. In the grandiose endeavor to Hellenize Rome, it was absolutely necessary that there be a poetic founding text equivalent to the Homeric poems. But the *Aeneid*, written at the zenith of Rome's history, was not so much a creation as a re-creation, not an origin but a conse-

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cration. During the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, the educational function of Virgil's poem was analogous to that of the Homeric poems in antiquity. In China the *Shih Ching* (Book of Songs), an anthology of ancient poems compiled by Confucius, had the same civilizing influence. In Japan this mission was fulfilled by the *Manyoshu* (The Ten-Thousand-Leaf Collection) and the great anthologies that followed it. Poetry as the founding Word of a people is a feature that appears in every civilization, from the poem of Gilgamesh, the probable source of our epic tradition, to that of the Cid. In other cultures, poetry was intimately associated not only with religion and mythology but also with the other arts. We know, for instance, that the Aztecs recited, sang, and what is even more noteworthy, danced their poems. Another feature common to ancient societies: the confraternities, brotherhoods, order of poets. These groups frequently fulfilled religious and liturgical functions. Among many peoples, poets were regarded as clairvoyants and soothsayers. It was widely believed that the poet knew the future because he knew the past. His knowledge was the knowledge of origins. In such societies, the present and the future are both functions, in the mathematical sense of the word, of the past.

The collections of poetic texts, true founding writings, constituted what our secular society today calls a *classical canon.* Without these poems it is impossible to know and understand their societies. The aesthetic, ethical, and philosophical influence they exerted was immense. In Greece, tragedy was nurtured by the epic, both its conflicts and its heroes. Similarly, philosophy began as a critique of Homer, of his theology and moral code. The classical canon was transmitted through the education of adolescents: poetry was a principal subject in the curriculum of the young. Thus, alongside civic and religious education, and exercises in preparation for combat, poetry was an initiation into adult life and its two great facets: action and contemplation. Citizen, patrician, *eques*, mandarin, *tecuhtli*, and other social groups and categories that managed the affairs of ancient societies in both peace and war – all were educated, formed by a poetic tradition that inspired their public discourse and their public action.

The influence of poetry was equally profound in private life: eroticism, friendship, piety in the form of mercy toward one's unfortunate fellow man (Achilles face-to-face with Priam), solitude, the bitter pleasures of melancholy, the fragile realm of memory. Poets helped us to know what the passions were, and hence to know ourselves: envy, sensuality, cruelty, hypocrisy – in short, all the complexity of the human soul. The first great love poem of the West dates from the third century B.C.: Theocritus's pointed tale of the sensual and ingenuous, rabid and sublime love of the ill-starred young Simetha. Later, in Rome, Catullus and

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Propertius shed light on the dark corners of love and discovered the insidious power of that fatal passion, jealousy. Without Catallus and Propertius, Shakespeare might not have been able to conceive Othello, or Proust to discover Swann's torment. From the feudal era to that of the bourgeoisie, poetry continued to inspire warriors and lovers: Parsifal and Roland, courtly love and Petrarchism, libertines and Romantics. One of the roots of contemporary feminism may be found in the "courts of love" of the twelfth century. As in antiquity and in the East, poetry also nurtured philosophers. There is scarcely one of our great thinkers, from Saint Thomas to Machiavelli, from Bacon to Schopenhauer, from Montaigne to Karl Marx, who has not written poems, or whose writings are not embellished with verses and maxims taken from poets. Seen from this perspective, the numerical question disappears. We do not know how many Romans read Ovid, how many Italians Petrarch, or how many French Ronsard, but we know *who* read them. And these readers, whether few or many, were the head and heart of society, its thinking and acting nucleus. Although they belonged to the ruling classes, many were dissidents, critics of the status quo. Some were recluses, intellectual hermits.

The change began in the last years of the nineteenth century. After the great pitched battles of Romanticism, poetry retreated underground: clandestine war, conspiracy in the catacombs. But as we have seen, this retreat was a victory: yesterday's poets, cursed and bound for Hell, are today's patron saints. The displacement of the humanities, which are no longer the center of our educational systems, has had even graver consequences. A sign of the times: Baudelaire wrote a poem in Latin, Rimbaud won first prize in Latin composition in his lycée, and Lautréamont studied literary precepts in a treatise by José Gomez Hermosilla, a severe classicist and a remarkable translator of the *Iliad* – but Whitman, the first great modern poet, never went through a university or took a course in the humanities. Loss or gain? I would say that the gain compensates for the loss. And Whitman carries on a different tradition, one no less venerable than the Greco-Latin: the tradition based on the Bible.

Today the sciences occupy the place of Latin and Greek. The change has been natural and justified. But the preeminence of *scientism*, a modern superstition, has been less natural and is totally unjustified. Each science may speak with authority with regard to its particular domain: there is no such thing as Science; there are only sciences. But scientism would translate the discourse of physics, chemistry, or biology into human domains: history, society, the individual, the passions. One could ask: Is the practice of the various sciences possible without the common store of wisdom that is represented by the humanities? Perhaps, but the cost is immense. Neither Freud nor Einstein forgot the classics.

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The proliferation of the social sciences is even more dangerous than the scientistic superstition. I refer not to the real value of these sciences, which is estimable, despite the frailty of their methods and the uncertainty of their conclusions, but to the misuse of them by ideologues wearing the mask of professor or scientific researcher. The harm done has been twofold: political and aesthetic. Our classics, apart from their being examples of formal perfection and sources of spiritual pleasure, were teachers of political wisdom for two millennia. Today this function is fulfilled by professors of sociology and so-called political science. The majority of these people are ignorant of the classical heritage, or scorn it. Firmly seated on their dogmas, they impart from their university chairs formulas that explain any and every social phenomenon save that of their own peculiar position in the modern world. In the name of modernity, they have been the spokesmen – and sometimes the middlemen – of a new political and intellectual obscurantism. Intolerant sophists, they are unworthy heirs of the Enlightenment. In recent days we have been witness to dramatic changes in those European countries living under the regime of "bureaucratic socialism." It would be futile to search through the writings of the professors for the slightest premonition of these prodigious changes, for that matter, or an explanation today of their cause. In order to find coherent critics who foresaw what is happening now, it is necessary to reread the texts of the dissidents and the excommunicated. The professors' blindness comes from their faith in ideologies, the domain of illusory certitudes, and from their disdain for history, which is subject to chance and the unpredictable. Classical literature, on the other hand, is thoroughly imbued with the random nature of historical events. Machiavelli and Montesquieu, Tocqueville and Marx profited from their reading of the poets and historians of antiquity. What do academic politicologues read today, if anything? There are exceptions, of course, but still they are exceptions.

The application of the methods of the natural sciences to the study of society and social change has not had, so far, the results hoped for. Despite this failure, smug and thoroughly confused theorists have decided to extend the scientific method to literature as well. They forget that different realities require different methods, different criteria. The transformation of a cell is not the same thing as the transformation of a society; nor does social change suffice to explain change in the realm of art and literature. The creative work is reduced to nothing more than a social document, and then the claim is made that the text does not really say what it says. In other words, a text is a mere cover for some social, political reality. The mission of the critic is to uncover that reality. To read a text is to decipher it, stripping it of its supposed meanings to reach what the words conceal. Literary criticism becomes an exercise in

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investigating secrets, in the vein not so much of Sherlock Holmes as of Torquemada and State Prosecutor Vishinsky. Shakespeare's *Tempest* turns into a fireworks display whose bright play of light blinds us to the base reality: the birth of modern imperialism. Prospero is the European master and Caliban his colonial slave. The text is a tissue of lies; by unraveling it, the critic unmasks the author, who is the accomplice of tyranny and oppression. No one escapes the ridiculous verdicts of these judges in their robes and mortarboards.

This change has affected the art not of writing poems but of reading them. Reading the *Odyssey* as a literary text is not the same as reading it as a social document. If we read it as an amazing adventure in which heroes are moved by strong, simple passions, the whole told with consummate verbal art at once noble and direct, how can we fail to be fascinated by the cunning of Ulysses as he tricks Polyphemus or unties the bonds of love with which Circe attempts to imprison him? For anyone who reads this as a document, it is no more than a chapter in the history of human superstition. The Circe fable shedding light on belief in magic and its relation to sexuality; the story of Polyphemus read as an allegory of combat between a tribe of aborigines (the Cyclopes) and a handful of imperialist adventurers. Indeed, the *Odyssey* describes mores of unquestionable interest to the historian, but it is neither a historical account nor an ethnographic study: it is a poem, a verbal creation. Any reader who does not pause in awe at the beauty of certain strophes is a brutish boor. Nor should we approach this age-old poem as a sort of crossword puzzle which, once solved, will reveal to us the reality of Homeric Greece: a superstition-ridden agricultural society made up of miserable peasants, violent warriors and thieves, and liar poets. That is to say, yet another variant of class society and its iniquities. Such an interpretation, despite its crudity and oversimplification, may not be altogether wrong. But to read a poem in this way is like studying botany by scrutinizing a Corot or Monet landscape.

Outside the closed precinct of universities, the poetic tradition has been exposed to a continuous and insidious erosion which, precisely because it is not intentional, is extremely difficult to stop. The assault is not the result of a deliberate choice on the part of critics, as in the case of the doctrinaires I have mentioned, but of the nihilism inherent in all mechanisms. The agent of erosion is not an idea but a process: The growth of the publishing industry, combined with the power of publicity, has turned what was once the interchange of ideas, values, tastes, and opinions into a modern market. The literary world, like the artistic, scientific, and philosophical ones, was always an exchange, a trade in goods both material and spiritual: books are objects, and at the same time they are ideas and aesthetic forms. A famous literary review, published in Paris

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a few years before the Second World War, was called *Commerce*. The title, if I am not mistaken, came from Valéry. I imagine he was alluding, with a certain arrogance, to the exchange of extremely rare spiritual and aesthetic goods among a very select group of demanding connoisseurs. An idea characteristic of Valéry, and likewise one that betrays an artisan's view of intellectual and literary commerce. The transformation of the "commerce" of half a century ago into today's editorial industry has been yet another victory of the mass market over former practices.

The links in the assembly line of the literary market: the author produces consumer items (books) that the publisher manufactures and distributes to consumers (readers). A ceaseless assembly line that continually provides new products which by their very nature can never entirely satisfy the consumer's hunger. An invention of modern capitalism, reminiscent of Tantalus: more, ever more – and never enough. Charles Fourier believed that in the state of true civilization, which he called Harmony, a limited number of long-lasting objects of incomparable quality would be produced. But in our societies, every effort is made to produce the greatest number of objects of mediocre quality, short duration, and rapid consumption. I do not deny the advantages of a market economy. In the developed nations, it is the cause of an abundance without precedent in history (even though this abundance is very often misleading and superfluous: creating false needs and failing to address certain essential ones). But I note that as production and consumption increase, so does waste. The mountain of books accumulating in libraries and bookstores raises a worrisome question: What to do with the surplus?

The poetic tradition, as I have already said, is the result of the intersection of two axes, one spatial and the other temporal. The spatial is the diversity of publics in continual intercommunication; the temporal is the continuity through generations of poets and readers. Intercommunication enriches the tradition by bringing to it new blood and new eyes. Karl Marx kept company with Dante, and Stendhal with Byron, because people of different groups – some of them lovers of philosophy or the economic sciences, others of the novel or of history – communicated with one another. The custom still exists, but it is dying out. One of my most pleasant literary memories is of an evening gathering in the home of the physicist Steven Weinberg, during which the conversation shifted spontaneously from elementary particles to the poetry of Donne and Marvell. This plurality of readers of different disciplines, brought together by similar tastes and values, is what is meant by a tradition. It does not matter that within that tradition opinions vary or are even opposite: we all read Goethe, but each of us reads him with different eyes.

In a past that is still recent, tradition was nourished by the Greco-

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Latin classics. Today they are much less widely read, though fortunately they have not disappeared entirely; translations of Homer, Virgil, Theocritus, and Horace are still done into a great number of the world's languages. On the other hand, we read modern writers in other languages far more frequently today than our fathers did. This network of coincidences and oppositions, some of them implicit, others explicit, constitutes the literary conversation of a period – a conversation almost always silent, conducted alone in a room with a book. As we read, we converse with authors in our own language and in other languages; some of those authors are alive, but the majority are not. Quevedo says, in a sonnet that seems to be written not on a sheet of paper but on a block of time that has turned to stone:

> Retired to the peace of this desert,*
> with a collection of books that are few but wise,
> I live in conversation with the departed
> and listen to the dead with my eyes.

The contemporary publishing industry is dissolving the diversity of publics into one impersonal majority. This is not the result of a deliberate choice made by this person or that, nor is it the work of a conspiracy: the trend comes from the very nature of the system that rules the world of publishing. The literary trade today is motivated by purely economic considerations. The value of a book, thus, is the number of people who purchase it. Earning money is a legitimate activity, and so is producing for the "mass public"; but a literature dies and a society becomes decadent when the principal aim of publishers is to manufacture best-sellers and works for popular entertainment and consumption. There are indeed times when the popularity of a book and its excellence coincide: the works of Dickens and Balzac, Byron and Victor Hugo, to cite a few examples from the last century. But one should not close one's eyes to the fact that the history of literature in the West, especially in the Modern Age, has been and is that of minorities: writers and critics who rebelled against the status quo, poets and novelists who invented new forms, artists who were hermetic and difficult. The logic of the marketplace is not the logic of literature.

As the publishing industry becomes more and more impersonal – the field has now been invaded by powerful multinational corporations – economic considerations replace literary ones. All is not lost, of course: a

*Quevedo wrote this sonnet in a little village in the north of the Sierra Morena, where he had a country house. *Desert* here means a place where there are few people.

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handful of publishing houses, long established and venerable, have held out; small presses, set up to bring out books of poems in particular, turn up here and there; and finally, university presses in certain countries are beginning to replace commercial houses as publishers of works hard to sell. As to this last development, I have my doubts: the great literature of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was written and printed, almost entirely, outside the universities. But apart from these laudable exceptions, the publishing industry, as it increases the number of editions put out and copies sold, tends to diminish the diversity of books and, as a consequence, the diversity of readers. In other sectors of the economy, a variety of merchandise is essential but the trend here is toward uniformity. The ideal is one and only one public: readers who all have exactly the same taste, who all read the same book. That book is many books: a new book by a different author may be published every day, but they are all really the same book.

The trend toward uniformity and a limited choice of books also affects the author. In the past, he wrote for a public, but at the same time for a reader who was a conversational partner. All poets dream of an ideal reader: his own, her own. Today the author must confront the publisher and his cohort of marketing executives. Moreover, in each house, especially in the United States, there are "editors" whose job it is to correct and adapt manuscripts. Certain editing practices, in and of themselves, are reasonable and justified, but as a whole they are deplorable: they threaten to destroy the diversity of authors, works, and readers. An incalculable loss, for not only are conversational partners lost, even though the number of readers increases, but the very notion of the conversational partner disappears. And along with it, the dialogue between author and reader. The most serious question of all: *From where* does a person write and read? For the modern publishing system, aided by advertising and television, all places, no matter how remote, are *here*. And where is here? In that nowhere that is everywhere. *Here* is situated in time; it is *right now*. The spatial axis dissolves into the temporal axis.

Marketing practices have an equally corrosive effect on the temporal axis of poetic tradition. The preeminence of the *now* weakens the ties that join us to the past. The press, television, and advertising offer us daily images of what is happening this minute in Patagonia, in Siberia, and in the neighborhood right next to ours. We are immersed in a now that never stops blinking and that gives us the feeling of constant acceleration. But are we really going somewhere? Or are we simply turning around and around in the same place? Whether illusory or real, the past whirls away at a dizzying pace and vanishes. The loss of the past inevitably results in the loss of the future. Since the eighteenth century, our civilization has been oriented toward the future. Its guide on this

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journey was the idea of progress, our polar star. For some years now, this star has been growing dimmer, and the present has been inheriting its brightness. But our present is a weightless thing: it floats along, it does not rise, it moves but makes no headway. It thinks it is going everywhere but is going nowhere: it has lost its sense of direction. The ends evaporate, and in compensation the mean increase. Our present is a time that has no north to guide it. The expansion of the present, in the domain of literary tradition, manifests itself in the trend toward instantaneous communication. Endurance, that attribute of perfection, yields its place to quick consumption. The past and future vanish, and the present intensifies into a single instant: the three times are exhaled in one breath. The instant explodes and dissipates.

Poets have been the memory of their peoples. Homer sang of the deeds of a heroic age and told of what took place many years before: For him, the future did not exist; he lived in a static society whose eyes were focused on a past that was the model and source of the present. Later, the Greek poets were inspired by Homer, the Romans by the Greeks, Catullus followed the Alexandrians, Virgil guided Dante in his wanderings through Hell, Petrarch was the model for European poets, and so on down to our own day. Each poet is an undulation on the river of tradition, a moment of language. At times poets deny their tradition, but deny it only to invent another. The phenomenon is periodic, and has intensified in the modern era. From Romanticism to Surrealism, each poetic movement re-created its tradition. The Surrealists made lists of poets that were a parody both of the Last Judgment and of the final examination for a bachelor's degree. Each poet on the list was given a grade alongside his name: Baudelaire 8, Rimbaud 9 and 1/2, Lautréamont 10 (summa cum laude), Apollinaire 7, Claudel -5, Valéry 1, Apuleius 6, Virgil 0, Dante 8, Sade 10 (with honors), and so on. Most poets choose their ancestors: Eliot chose the Metaphysical Poets and Laforgue; Pound chose Cavalcanti and Li Po; Neruda chose Whitman; Borges chose another Whitman, not Neruda's; and Whitman chose an anonymous poet named Walt, a cosmos, and a borough of New York City. The invention of the past is a projection into the future. Every poet wishes to be read in the future, and in a profounder and more generous way than in his own time. It is not a thirst for fame; it is a thirst for life. The poet knows that he is simply a link in a chain, a bridge between yesterday and tomorrow. But suddenly, as this century draws to an end, he discovers that the bridge is suspended between two abysses: that past that is retreating in the distance, and the future that is crumbling. The poet feels lost in time.

Poetic forms are essential in poetry, because they are our recourse against death and the attrition of the years. Form is made to last. At

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times it is a challenge, at times a fortress or a monument, but it always represents the will to endure. Time concentrated and transmuted. It sets in opposition to real time not fixed structure but living architecture. Sonnet or ballad, Italian hendecasyllable or Japanese tanka, free verse or poem in prose – all forms and all meters are arks for crossing the sea of years and centuries. The memory of mankind. Art is a will to form because it is a will to endure. When a form becomes outworn or turns into a mere formula, the poet must invent another. Or find an old one and remake it: reinvent it. The invention of a form is often a new thing that is two or three hundred years old. There is nothing newer than the Chinese poems that Pound re-created, the songs in which Apollinaire brought medieval meters back to life, or the hesitant music, evasive yet evocative, that Dario learned from Verlaine, and Verlaine from Villon. But the publishing industry prefers digestible novelties, formulas to forms.

The first half of this century was a period of invention and creation in all the arts. Thus it was also a time when new art was unpopular, as had been the case with Symbolism. Fortunately, poets and artists enjoyed the support of a number of patrons, publishers, art galleries, and collectors. The modern art that today hundreds of thousands admire in museums, and the books that everybody talks about and buys, were the art and literature of a small minority little more than fifty years ago. Since the Second World War, artistic activities have multiplied: museums, galleries, biennials, international auctions, rivers of gold, oceans of publicity. The same thing has occurred, though on a far lesser scale, in the world of publishing. Still, stereotypes predominate in both the visual arts and literature. The "in" word *postmodernism* designates an eclecticism. Rehashing abounds in painting and the other arts. It will be said that I exaggerate. Although the causes of this situation are many and complex, I firmly believe that the principal cause is the transformation of what was once the literary and artistic trade into a modern financial market. An economic change that coincides with another, a moral-political change, in the democracies of the West: the turning of citizens into consumers.

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NORMAN MAILER

Harlot's Lady

I was introduced to Kittredge toward the end of that junior year at Yale. Just before Easter vacation, a summons came by telegram:

> COME MEET MY FIANCÉE HADLEY KITTREDGE GARDINER. SPEND EASTER AT THE KEEP WITH KITTREDGE AND JEAN HARLOW.

Back to Doane. I had not been to the island since my father, in need of the money a couple of years ago, had pushed and cajoled his two brothers and a single sister into agreement on the sale. Why his funds needed replenishment remained one more family mystery. Among the Hubbards, windfalls, disasters, and outright peculation were kept at a greater distance from the children than sexual disclosure; all we knew (and it was talked about in whispers) was: "A damn shame. Got to sell the Keep. Boardman's idea." My father walked about for two weeks that summer with a mouth as tight as a South American dictator under palace arrest. I hardly cared. I loved the Keep less than the others, or so I thought. It was only over the next summer which I spent at loose ends in Southampton with my mother, getting drunk with new, rich friends I did not like, and banging tennis balls through August days, that I came to understand what it was to lose the splendor of afternoon silences over the Maine hills.

The call to go back to the Keep was agreeable, therefore; the opportunity to see Harlot spoke of more. I was still like a girl who fell in love with a man who went away to war. If he had not come back for three years, no matter. The girl went on no other dates; she did not even accept telephone calls from nice boys.

I was in love with the C.I.A. I am one of those types – is it one in ten, or one in fifty? – who can give up just about all of life for concentration upon a part of life. I read spy novels, made island hops from word to word in Skeat, attended foreign-policy forums at Yale, and studied photographs of Lenin and Stalin and Molotov, of Gromyko and Lavrenti Beria; I wanted to comprehend the face of the enemy. I eschewed political arguments about Republicans and Democrats. They hardly mattered. Allen Dulles was my President, and I would be a com-

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Editor's Note: "Harlot's Lady" is excerpted from the novel *Harlot's Ghost* by Norman Mailer. Copyright © 1991 by Norman Mailer. To be published by Random House.

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bat trooper in the war against the Devil. I read Spengler and brooded through my winters in New Haven about the oncoming downfall of the West and how it could be prevented. Be certain that under these circumstances I sent Harlot a telegram that I was on my way, signed it Ashenden (for Somerset Maugham's British spy), and drove my car, a 1949 Dodge coupe, up from New Haven all the way to the back side of Mount Desert, where I found the house not at all as it used to be.

I do not know if I care to describe the changes. I would need to add a treasures-in-trash catalogue to the insights of a geologist: generations of Hubbards had left their strata. We used to have oak whatnots in corners, and blonde-wood Danish in the Cunard; one fine old drafting table at the Camp had come down to us from Doane Hadlock Hubbard (who also left us punctilious drawings of a proposed lookout tower one hundred feet high that he once planned to build on the southern head of the island). Along the walls were hordes of washed-out framed photographs, spotted, glass-cracked, oak-mitred, come down to us from the 1850s on. Then there were the color prints, long sun-faded, of Matisse, Braque, Dufy, Duchamp – all introduced by my mother. They had been kept, even if she never came back. Once up on a wall, things remained; it was a summer house. No wars of selection went on – merely an accommodation of accumulation. The beds were a disaster area, summer-cottage pallets. Lumpy, broken-spring mattresses with old ticking, wooden bureaus with thick paint scored by fingernail scrapings to attest to hot bored summer afternoons; spider webs on casement windows, birds' nests under the eaves, and mouse droppings in many an unused room were the price we paid for that much spread of house.

Rodman Knowles Gardiner and his wife fixed it up when they bought it from us. Kittredge's father, being a Shakespeare scholar (distantly related to the famous Shakespearean, George Kittredge, also of Harvard), knew enough about the unwinding of plots to stipulate later in the deed of transfer to the couple for a wedding present that in the event of Kittredge's divorce from Hugh Montague, she was to own the Keep without impediment. Which is how I returned to living in it. By way of Kittredge. But that was in time to come. Now in the Easter of my junior year at Yale, more than two years after the closing with the Hubbards, Dr. Gardiner and his wife had certainly spruced up the Keep. Retired from teaching, they moved some of their best Colonial furniture from their Cambridge home to Maine. There were drapes on the windows now and the walls bore Dr. Gardiner's collection of nineteenth-century Victorian paintings. The bedrooms had new beds. At first sight I hated it all. We now looked like a New England hostelry of the sort that keeps the temperature too high in winter and screws down the windows.

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I spent a difficult two hours after my arrival. Neither Hugh Montague nor his fiancée were there – instead, I was received by the eminent Shakespearean and his wife, Maisie. They endured me; I suffered. He was a Harvard professor of a variety that may no longer exist. Dr. Gardiner was so well established that there were tiers to his eminence. Stages of his personality, much like assistants in a descending chain of command, were delegated to conversation. We spoke of the Yale and Harvard football teams of the previous fall, then of my category in squash – I was a B-group player – and of my father, whom Dr. Gardiner had last seen with Mr. Dulles at an annual garden party in Washington: "He looked very well indeed – of course, that was last year."

"Yessir. He still looks well."

"Good for him."

As a tennis player, Dr. Gardiner would not have let you enjoy rallies during the warm-up. He'd drive your innocent return cross-court and leave you to trot after it.

Maisie was not conspicuously better. She spoke of the flower garden she would put in this May; she intoned in a dreary if nonetheless dulcet voice against the unpredictability of spring weather in Maine. She mentioned the hybrids she would plant; when I offered mention of some wildflowers to look for in June and July, she lost much interest in me. Conversational pauses expanded into an extension of silence. In desperation, I tried to charge into Dr. Gardiner's center of strength. I expatiated on a term paper (for which I had received an A) on Ernest Hemingway's work since *Green Hills of Africa*. The consciously chosen irony of the later style showed, I said, that he had been enormously influenced by *King Lear*, particularly by some of Kent's lines, and I quoted from act one, scene four, "I do prefer . . . to love him that is loved, to converse with him that is wise and say little, to fear judgment, to fight when I cannot choose, and to eat no fish." I was about to add, "I can keep honest counsel, ride, run, mar a curious tale in telling it, and deliver a plain message bluntly," but Dr. Gardiner said, "Why concern yourself with the copyist?"

We sat in silence. After a stretch, Kittredge and Hugh Montague came back in the twilight. They had been – it was a very cold Easter – ice climbing on parts of the lower trail of Gorham Mountain. Nice stuff, Kittredge assured me, and she looked full of red cheeks and Christmas.

She was lovely beyond any measure I had for a woman. Her dark hair was cut short like a boy's, and she was wearing pants and a windbreaker, but she was the most wonderful looking girl. She could have been a heroine out of her father's collection of painted Victorian damsels, pale as their cloisters, lovely as angels. That was Kittredge – except that her color today after the afternoon's ice climb was as startling

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as a view of wild red berries in a field of snow.

"It's wonderful to meet you. We're cousins. Did you know that?" she asked.

"I suppose I did."

"I looked it up last evening. Third cousins. That's no-man's land if you get down to it." She laughed with such a direct look (as if to speak of how very attractive a man younger than herself might be if she liked him) that Hugh Montague actually stirred. I knew little enough yet of jealousy, but I could feel the wave that came over from him.

"Well, I must tell you," she said, "all the while Hugh was taking us up this dreadful pitch, I kept saying I wouldn't marry him until he promised never to do such a thing to me again, whereupon he said, 'You and Harry Hubbard are in the same boat.' He banishes us equally from his grubby art."

"Actually," said Hugh Montague, "she's a little better than you, Harry. All the same, it's hopeless."

"Well, I should hope so," said Maisie Gardiner. "Fool's play to risk your neck on ice."

"I love it," said Kittredge. "The only thing Hugh would bother to explain was, 'Ice won't betray you until it does.' What a husband you'll make.'

"Relatively secure," said Hugh.

Rodman Knowles Gardiner had a coughing fit at the thought of his daughter in marriage.

At precisely that moment Kittredge said, "I believe Daddy thinks of me as Desdemona."

"I don't see myself," said her father, "as a blackamoor, nor espoused to my daughter. You have rotten logic, darling."

Kittredge changed the subject.

"Never did any ice climbing?" she asked of me. When I shook my head, Kittredge said, "It's no worse than the awful thing they do to you at the Farm when you have to leap out of a mud ditch and scramble up a link fence in between sweeps of the searchlight." She stopped, but not in caution, more to calculate when I would be eligible for that chore. "I guess you'll be getting into it year after next. The fence is modeled on the Grosse-Ullner barrier in East Germany."

Hugh Montague gave a smile with no amusement in it. "Kittredge, don't practice indiscretion as if it were your métier."

"No," said Kittredge, "I'm home. I want to talk. We're not in Washington, and I'm tired of pretending through one blah-blah cocktail party after another that I'm a little file clerk at Treasury. 'Oh,' they say, 'what do you file?' 'Oodles of stuff,' I tell them back. 'Statistics.' They know I'm lying. Obviously, I'm a madwoman spook. It stands out."

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"What stands out is how spoiled you are," said her fiancé.

"How could I not be? I'm an only child," said Kittredge. "Aren't you?" she went on to ask.

"By half," I said, and when no one responded, I felt obliged to give a summary explanation.

She appeared to be fascinated. "You must be full," she said, "of what I call ghost-overlays." She held up a marvelous white hand as if she were playing traffic cop in a skit at a charity ball. "But I promised everybody I would not theorize this weekend. Some people drink too much. I never stop theorizing. Do you think it's a disease, Hugh?"

"Preferable to drink," he offered.

"I'll tell you about ghost-overlays when we're alone, " she declared to me in front of him.

I winced within. Hugh Montague was possessive. If she smiled nicely at me, he saw the end of their romance in her smile. Ultimately, he was right – it is just that lovers condense all schedules. What would take us more than fifteen years looked like immediate danger.

On the other hand, he was bored. Carrying on a conversation with Rodman and Maisie Gardiner was equal to taking dinner in a room where light bulbs keep going off and on. Most of the time we talked as if there were rules against logical connection. During drinks I kept track of a few remarks. Ten statements were uttered over ten minutes. Three belonged to Dr. Gardiner, two were by Maisie, three by Harlot, one from Kittredge, one from me. There are limits to memory. I offer a reasonable substitute.

Rodman Knowles Gardiner: "I've got Freddy Eaves at the boat yard looking out for a new spinnaker."

Maisie: "Why do the royal purple zinnias slip into blight so much more readily than the cosmos zinnias?"

Hugh Montague: "There was word of a major avalanche yesterday in the Pyrenees."

Kittredge: "If you would give the purple zinnias a bit less mulch, Mother . . ."

Maisie: "Is Gilley Butler a reliable handyman, Mr. Hubbard? Your father, Cal Hubbard, says to watch out for him."

Myself: "I should listen to my father."

Montague: "They weren't carrying avalanche cords so the bodies are not recoverable."

Dr. Gardiner: "The spinnaker ripped in the Backside Regatta. I had to finish with a jenny. Half as much headway."

Montague: "Three cheers for making the honor roll again, Harry."

Dr. Gardiner: "I'm going to fill the martini shaker."

Kittredge and I had, nonetheless, one hour alone. She demanded it.

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On Sunday morning, coming back from Easter Mass, with an hour to wait for Maisie's cook to serve us Sunday dinner, she forced the situation. "I want Harry to show me the island," she said to Hugh. "I'm sure he knows the nooks and crannies." A lack of plausibility quivered in the air. It would not require a guide to find nooks and crannies on our small island.

Hugh nodded. He smiled. He held out his hand like a pistol, thumb up, forefinger extended. Wordlessly, he fired a shot at me. "Keep those nasal passages clean, Herrick," he said.

Kittredge and I walked in kelp and sea wrack on the pebbled shore. Near us reared the unseen presence of Harlot, a stallion over the field of our mood.

"He's awful," Kittredge said at last and took my hand. "I adore him but he's awful. He's *raunchy*. Harry, do you love sex?"

"I would hate to think I didn't," I said.

"Well, I would hope you do. You are as good-looking as Montgomery Clift, so you ought to. I know I like sex. It's all sex with Hugh and me. We have so little else in common. That's why he's jealous. His Omega is virtually void of libido and his Alpha is overloaded."

I did not know as yet that she had been consorting with these two principalities, Alpha and Omega, ever since the concept first came to her four years ago. Now I heard of them for the first time. I would encounter those words again over the next thirty years.

"What makes it worse," she said, "is that I'm still a virgin. I think he is too, although he won't offer a conclusive word about it."

I was twice shocked, once at these astonishing facts, and again that she would tell me. She laughed, however. "I take a True Confession pill every night," she said. "Are you a virgin, Harry?"

"Regrettably," I replied.

She laughed and laughed. "I don't want to be," she confided. "It's absurd. It isn't as if Hugh and I don't know each other's bodies rather well. In fact, we know them perfectly. We're very much naked together. That kind of truth binds us. But he insists on waiting for marriage to consummate the last part."

"Well, you'll be wed soon, I guess."

"In June," she said. "We were supposed to gather up a few final plans this weekend, but Daddy and Hugh when put together are hopeless. Worse than two relics in an old folks' home trying to make conversation with each other's dentures."

It was my turn to laugh. It went on for so long that in embarrassment I sat down. She sat beside me. We perched on the southern head of the island and looked down Blue Hill Bay to the cold Easter sun shining over the remote Atlantic.

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"Hugh may be the most complicated person I've encountered," she said, "but this weekend he's ridiculously simple. He's in a thundering grouch because we can't get together at night. Daddy insisted on putting me in the room next to Mother and him. So Hugh is falling apart. He's outrageously priapic, you see. Back in Washington he's on me all the time. I hope you don't mind hearing this, Harry. I've got to talk."

"Yes," I said. I didn't know what she was talking about. The facts seemed to contradict each other. "How can he be on you," I asked, "if you're both virgins?"

"Well, we go in for what he calls 'the Italian solution.' "

"Oh," I said. I didn't know anymore. Then I did. It was physically painful to contemplate what she allowed him to do. Nor could I conceive how it connected with all her soap and sunlight.

"Actually," she said with the quick, rising zephyr of a Radcliffe girl, "I love it. It's debauched. To be a virgin and yet feel so wanton. Harry, it's opened a purview on the Renaissance for me. Now I see how they could observe the Catholic forms and yet live in such near-mortal violation of so much. That's not the unhealthiest approach, you know."

"Do you talk this way to everyone?" I asked.

"Heavens, no," she said. "You're special."

"How can that be? You don't know me."

"I only needed one look. Before it's over, I said to myself, I'm going to tell this man everything. You see, Harry, I love you."

"Oh," I said. "I guess I love you too." I did not have to pretend. The thought of Hugh Montague as a satyr hot on her back left me feeling criminally wounded. I might as well have been the cuckolded lover. I hated how her confidence had reached so easily to the very center of me.

"Of course," she said, "you and I are never going to do anything about it. We're cousins, and that's what we'll always be. Dearest friends. At worst, kissing cousins." She gave the littlest example of such a kiss to my lips. That too went all the way in. Her mouth had the scent of a petal just separated from the flower. I had never been near a nicer breath. Nor one with more surprises. It was like picking up a great novel and reading the first sentence. *Call me Ishmael.*

"Someday," she said, "after Hugh and I are tired of each other, maybe you and I will have an affair. Just the passing kind to give a lot of naughty pleasure."

"Kissing cousins," I replied hoarsely.

"Yes. Only now, Harry, I need a good friend. I need one like pure stink. Somebody I can tell everything to."

"I'm incapable of telling all," I confessed, as if I had numerous ad-

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ventures meticulously secreted away.

"You *are* buttoned up. It's what I brought you out of the house for. I want to talk about your ghost-overlays."

"Is that phrase from your psychological theories?"

"Yes."

"My father told me you're a genius. Allen Dulles says so."

"Well, I'm not," she said petulantly as if the stupidity of the supposition doubled every likelihood of great loneliness. "I have a brain that's marvelously empty when I'm not using it. So it allows thought to enter which other people would sweep away. Don't you think the heavens often reach us with their messages just as fully as dark forces below tickle our impulses?"

I nodded. I would not have known how to argue with this. But then, she was not looking for a debate. By her change in tone, I could sense that she was in a mood to expound.

"I've always found Freud uncongenial," she said. "He was a great man with bushels of discoveries, but he really had no more philosophy than a Stoic. That's not enough. Stoics make good plumbers. The drains go bad and you've got to hold your nose and fix them. End of Freud's philosophy. If people and civilization don't fit – which we all know anyway – why, says Freud, make the best of a bad lot."

She had obviously given this speech before. She must have to explain her thesis often on the job. So I took it as a mark of friendship that she was willing to outline it for me. Besides, I liked listening to her voice. I felt she would give this lecture because she wanted us to be closer. And felt a pure pang of the nicest kind of love. She was so beautiful, and so lonely. Wildflowers in her hair, and blue sneakers on her feet. I wanted to hug her, and would have, if not for a sense of the prodigiously long shadow of Hugh Montague.

"Philosophically speaking," she went on, "I am very much a dualist. I do not see how one can not be. It was all very well for Spinoza to postulate his Substance, that wonderfully elusive, metaphysical, metaphorical world-goo he employed to bind all opposites together and so be able to declare himself a monist. But I believe he was scuttling the philosophical bark. If God is trying to tell us anything, it is that every idea we have of Him, and of the universe, is dual. Heaven and Hell, God and the Devil, good and evil, birth and death, day and night, hot and cold, male and female, love and hate, freedom and bondage, consciousness and dreaming, the actor and the observer – I could add to such a list forever. Consider it: we are conceived out of the meeting of one sperm and one ovum. In the first instant of our existence, at the moment of our creation, we are brought to life by the joining of two separate entities; how very much unalike they are. Immediately, we start to de-

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velop with a right side and a left side. Two eyes, two ears, two nostrils, two lips, two sets of teeth, two lobes to the brain, two to the lungs, two arms, two hands, two legs, two feet."

"One nose," I said.

She had heard this before. "The nose is only a work of flesh surrounding two tunnels."

"One tongue," I said.

"Which has a top and a bottom and they're awfully different." She put her tongue out at me.

"Five fingers on each hand."

"The thumb is in opposition to the others. The big toe used to be in opposition to the foot."

We began to laugh. "Two testicles," I said, "but one penis."

"It's the weak link in my theory."

"One navel," I went on.

"You're awful," she said. "You're implacable."

"One head of hair."

"Which you part." She ruffled my hair. We almost kissed again. It was delicious to be flirting with a third cousin who was a couple of years older than me.

"Try to be solemn," she said. "There's really more evidence of duality than singularity. I decided to take the next step. What if there are not only two nostrils, two eyes, two lobes, and so forth, but two psyches as well, and they are separately equipped. They go through life like Siamese twins inside one person. Everthing that happens to one, happens to the other. If one gets married, the other is along for the ride. Otherwise, they are different. They can be just a little different, like identical twins, or they can be vastly different, like good and evil." She stopped for a nearer example. "Or optimism and pessimism. I'm going to choose that because it's somewhat easier to discuss. Most things that happen to us have optimistic overtones, and pessimistic possibilities. Suppose Alpha and Omega – for those are the two names I've finally applied to these two psyches – one has to offer them some kind of name, and A and Z is much too cold to live with – so, Alpha and Omega. It *is* pretentious, but one does get used to it."

"You were going to give me an example," I said.

"Yes. All right. Let us say that Alpha tends to be optimistic in most situations, whereas Omega is inclined to pessimism. Each experience that comes their way is interpreted with different sensitivities, so to speak. Alpha picks up what might be positive in a specific situation; Omega anticipates what could be lost. That bicameral mode of perception operates for any duality you wish to invoke. Take night and day. Let me propose that Omega is a little more responsive to nocturnal experiences than Al-

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pha. In the morning, however, Alpha is better at getting up and going off to work."

As if to prove the presence of Alpha and Omega within herself, her intimacy, so innocent and audacious at once, had by now drawn back, and the pedant had appeared. One would have to win both sides of this woman. It also occurred to me that I was not being very loyal to Hugh Montague, but what the hell, that might be my Omega. "I just don't see," I said, "why the two must react differently all the time."

"Remember," she said, holding up an instructor-like finger, "Alpha and Omega originate from separate creatures. One is descended from the sperm cell, Alpha; Omega from the ovum."

"You are saying we have a male and a female psyche inside ourselves?"

"Why not? There's nothing mechanical about it," said Kittredge. "The male side can be full of the so-called female qualities, whereas Omega can be an outrageous bull of a woman just as virile and muscular as a garbage collector." She gave a merry look as if to show the return of her Alpha. Or was it Omega? "God wants us to be as various and faceted as kaleidoscopes. Which looks to the next point: Hugh and I agree on this: The war between God and the Devil usually goes on in both psychic entities. That's as it should be. Schizophrenics tends to separate good and evil altogether, but in more balanced people, God and the Devil fight not only in Alpha, but in Omega as well."

"There seems to be endless capacity for strife in your system."

"Of course there is. Doesn't that fit human nature?"

"Well," I said, "I still can't see why the Creator desired such a complicated design."

"Because he wished to give us free will," she said. "I agree with Hugh on this as well. Free will amounts to giving the Devil equal opportunity."

"How can you know that?" I blurted out.

"It's what I think," she said simply. "Don't you see, we have a true and real need for two developed psyches, each with its own superego, ego, and id. That way, one can feel some three-dimensionality, so to speak, in our moral experience. If Alpha and Omega are quite unalike, and, believe me, they often are, then they can look upon the same happening from wholly separate points of view. It's why we have two eyes. For the same reason. So we can estimate distance."

"Account for this," I said. "When our eyes become too different from each other, we need glasses. If Alpha and Omega are awfully different, how can a person function?"

"Look at Hugh," she said. "His Alpha and Omega must be as far apart as the sun and the moon. Great people, and artists, and extraordi-

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nary men and women have dramatically different Alpha and Omega. Of course, so do the feebleminded, the addictive, and the psychotic."

Something in the certainty of her voice was making me dogged. "How do you account, then," I asked, for the difference between an artist and a psychotic?"

"The quality of inner communication, of course. If Alpha and Omega are incredibly different, but can manage all the same to express their separate needs and perceptions to each other, then you have an extraordinary person. Such people can find exceptional solutions. Artists, especially. You see, when Alpha and Omega don't communicate, then one or the other must become the master or there's a standstill. So the loser becomes oppressed. That's a desperately inefficient way of living."

"Like totalitarianism?"

"Precisely. You do see what I'm talking about."

I was awfully pleased to hear that. Encouraged, I asked: "Would a healthier person have an Alpha and Omega about as different, say, as Republicans and Democrats? Agree on some things, disagree on others, but work it out?"

She beamed. I had brought out her better side. The wicked light was in her eye again. "You're wonderful," she said. "I do love you. You're so direct."

"You are making fun of me."

"I'm not," she said. "I'm going to use your example with some of those dummies I have to give explanations to."

"Don't they love your ideas? I can see where Alpha and Omega tell us a lot about spies."

"Of course. But so many of the people I work with are afraid to trust it. I'm just a girl to them. So they can't believe that this could prove to be the first reliable psychological theory to explain how spies are able to live with the tension of their incredible life-situations, and in fact, will not only bear up under such a double-life, but indeed, go looking for it."

I nodded. She had termed me direct, but I was wondering if her mode of presentation might not also be somewhat too unadorned. Most of the intellectuals I had met at Yale seemed obliged on first meeting to fire off an artillery barrage of great and/or esoteric authors they had presumably absorbed. With Kittredge, however, one citing of Spinoza plus one reference to Freud seemed to take care of it. She had not sent out a cavalry of esteemed authorities to turn my flank. She pursued her thoughts; they were enough. I thought she showed the forceful but innocent head of an inventor.

Well, we went on talking. We never came to ghost-overlays, but before we were done with our hour in the nooks and crannies of

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Doane, I was somewhat offended that she could take as much pleasure in exposition as in our flirtation. Before we went back to the house, therefore, I tried to tease her. I asked her to confess: Who was her own Alpha, her own Omega?

"Oh," she said, "others perceive such things better than oneself. Tell me your impressions of how they shape up in me."

"Oh," I said in imitation of her voice, "I think your Alpha is full of loyalty and your Omega is as treacherous as the tides. Alpha is surfeited with chastity, and Omega is unbalanced with sacrilege. You're a spontaneous child on one side and an empire-builder on the other."

"You're a devil through and through," she said, and gave me another kiss on the lips.

Nothing will ever tell me for certain whether Harlot saw that small embrace or merely sensed it. As we walked back, hand in hand, we came on him standing above a rock. He had been holding a view of our approach. I have no idea how long he had been there, but some constraint in the pit of my heart seemed confirmed. He certainly did not alter his manner, but intimacy between Kittredge and me was *singed* by his presence. The word is just. When we came near, my eyebrows felt like ash: I wondered if I would pay for my hour with his fiancée when I joined the C.I.A.

What I have next to relate is painful. That Easter Sunday evening, Dr. Gardiner gave vent to the buried furies in his throat, and honored his guests: by the light of the fire in his den, he read Shakespeare aloud to us.

He offered an early work: *Titus Andronicus*. An odd choice. I would not recognize how bizarre until I knew the family better. Dr. Gardiner considered *Titus Andronicus* one of Shakespeare's poorest plays. Uninspired, and much too dreadful. Yet Dr. Gardiner read from it on Sunday night with a voice full of passion, choosing the terrible speech where Titus tells Chiron and Demetrius that in consequence of their vile acts on his family – they have severed his hand and cut off both hands of his daughter, Lavinia – he, Titus, will now revenge himself.

> *Hark, wretches! How I mean to martyr you,*
> *This one hand yet is left to cut your throats,*
> *Whilst Lavinia 'tween her stumps doth hold*
> *The basin that receives your guilty blood.*
> *Hark, villains, I will grind your bones to dust,*
> *And with your blood and it I'll make a paste;*
> *And of the paste a coffin I will rear;*
> *And make two pasties of your shameful heads.*

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And now prepare your throats. Lavinia, come,
Receive the blood, and when that they are dead,
Let me go grind their bones to powder small.
And with this hateful liquor temper it;
And in that paste let their vile heads be baked.
Come, come, be everyone officious
To make this banquet, which I wish might prove
More stern and bloody than the Centaur's feast.

He recited it in the full sonority of a renowned lecture voice, gave it all the Elizabethan hullaballoo due vowels and consonants grappling with one another over hurdles and down falls: how he relished the conjunctive sinews of these words. Hair stood on my neck. I knew then what a sixth sense was hair.

"I do not approve of the play," said Dr. Gardiner when he was done, "but the bile of the ages is in the boil of this fabulous stuff."

Maisie had fallen asleep while he read. Her head was to one side, her mouth was open, and I thought for a moment she had suffered a stroke. I was mistaken. She had merely taken her nightly jot of three Seconals; soon Dr. Gardiner walked her up to bed. It would also take years before I learned – how many little confessions was Kittredge eventually to make! – that Dr. Gardiner had a preferred means of connubial union: it was to investigate Maisie while she slept. Kittredge discovered her father's habit when she was ten. She peeped and saw it all. In sleep, Maisie, a wanton of Morpheus, made cries like a bird.

Husbands and wives have been known to discover that their separate childhoods are curiously linked: Kittredge and I had both seen our parents in the act of love. Or, more to the fact, we had, between us, seen three of our four parents. Titus and Lavinia, taken together, had lost three of their four hands. The allusion is meaningless, I am certain, except that numbers command their own logic, and Augustus Farr may have been on a promenade that night while Dr. Gardiner and his somnolent Maisie were transported to those underworlds that dwell beneath the navel.

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ROBERT ALTER

Nabokov and Memory

In Nabokov's notoriously restricted private canon of great twentieth-century novelists – he admitted only Proust, Joyce, Kafka, and Biely – it is Proust who often seems most intimately allied with his own aims and sensibility. A pursuit of time past is undertaken directly or obliquely in many of his novels, and most centrally in what are probably his two finest books – *Lolita* and *Speak, Memory*. The autobiography is as Proustian as anything Nabokov wrote, and it even includes a little *homage* to Proust: Nabokov's last vision of Colette, his Riviera childhood sweetheart, rolling a hoop glinting in the autumnal sun through dead leaves in a Parisian park, is a citation, a transposition of pattern from fiction to autobiography, of the scene at the end of *Swann's Way* in which the child Marcel beholds the adored figure of Gilberte Swann playing among the leaves in the Champs Elysées.

The special sense of euphoria associated with the recovery of the sensuous fullness of past experience is equally Nabokov's goal and Proust's, but the routes they follow toward this end notably diverge. The key concept for Proust is of course involuntary memory. The return of the past is vouchsafed by adventitious circumstances as a moment of grace, an unanticipated epiphany. Some otherwise trivial datum of experience, like the wobbling of uneven pavingstones in a Venetian piazza, jogs slumbering memory, flooding consciousness with a complex of seemingly forgotten, perhaps repressed, perceptions from the past. (The articulation of this experience, to be sure, becomes possible only through the finely attuned artistic discipline of the experiencer.) Nabokov, on the other hand, conceives his relation to the past much more exclusively in volitional terms. He is grateful for the occasional mnemonic clues that circumstances may cast his way, but for him the ability to revisit the past is chiefly a consequence of the imaginative concentration afforded by artful prose. It is only a little overstated to say that for Nabokov the apt manipulation of language makes the past come back.

A seemingly self-indulgent fantasy in the penultimate paragraph of *Speak, Memory* actually provides a nice definition of the book's project. Nabokov recalls how his four-year-old son, playing on a French Riviera beach not long before their departure for America, would gather tide-tossed treasures from the sea: "candy-like blobs of sea-licked glass – lemon, cherry, peppermint" and "sometimes small bits of pottery, still beautiful in glaze and color." He then reflects on this collection of frag-

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ments:

> I do not doubt that among those slightly convex chips of majolica ware found by our child there was one whose border of scrollwork fitted exactly, and continued, the pattern of a fragment I had found in 1903 on the same shore, and that the two tallied with a third my mother had found on that Mentone beach in 1882, and with a fourth piece of the same pottery that had been found by *her* mother a hundred years ago – and so on, until this assortment of parts, if all had been preserved, might have been put together to make the complete, the absolutely complete, bowl, broken by some Italian child, God knows where and when, and now mended by *these* rivets of bronze.

The meticulous fitting together of fragments into patterns, as Nabokov announces in the opening pages of the book, is what his autobiography is all about. It is at once a task excitingly imaginable and hopelessly impossible, as the language he chooses to evoke the broken bowl suggests. The crucial verbs are in the conditional tense ("if all had been preserved, might have been put together"), implying a condition obviously contrary to fact. The well-wrought urn of the past is, after all, irrevocably shattered; only a few of its shards can be gathered by the patient memoirist; and that is what is ultimately so wrenching about this remarkably happy autobiography. The "rivets of bronze" that might mend the assembled fragments are of course the fine linkages of Nabokov's polished prose. (The association of bronze with poetic art is confirmed earlier in the book in an explicit reference to Horace's *exegi monumentum*, "I have built a monument more lasting than bronze.") The image of bronze rivets represents precisely the paradoxical character of Nabokov's undertaking. A majolica bowl put back together with rivets is no longer what it once was, yet it has a new, if patently composite, wholeness, and the bronze that makes this possible, though superimposed on the original substance of the pottery, is itself a burnished material that contributes to an aesthetic effect. The Horatian background of the bronze metaphor also suggests perdurable strength, a quality that, as we shall see, is repeatedly manifested in the stylistic assurance of Nabokov's willed recuperation of the past.

Humbert Humbert at the beginning of his sad narrative cries out to a forever absent Lolita that he has only words to play with. That is also the desperate situation vis-à-vis his Russian past of the narrator of *Speak, Memory*, but he is able to overcome absence, to surprise himself with felicity, by fashioning the words into intricate configurations that bring back to him a substantial measure of what he has irrevocably lost. A full explanation of how he achieves this end would involve a comprehensive

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stylistic analysis of the autobiography. But I think we can get a fair sense of what happens in the prose by concentrating on the means employed to realize one of the most salient aspects of the mnemonic process in the book – the special quality of *illumination* of the remembered scene.

The equation between light and life – or rather, far more specifically, between life and a crack of light, a limited band of illumination against a large background of darkness – is announced in the very first sentence of *Speak, Memory*, at the beginning of that extraordinary preludic evocation of "chronophobia": "common sense tells us that our existence is but a brief crack of light between two eternities of darkness." This image becomes an organizing motif for the whole autobiography. Having been introduced as a metaphor, it later resurfaces as literal fact in the opening paragraphs of the butterfly chapter:

> On a summer morning, in the legendary Russia of my boyhood, my first glance upon awakening was for the chink between the white inner shutters. If it disclosed a watery pallor, one had better not open them at all, and so be spared the sight of a sullen day sitting for its picture in a puddle. How resentfully one would deduce, from a line of dull light, the leaden sky, the sodden sand, the gruel-like mess of broken brown blossoms under the lilacs – and that flat, fallow leaf (the first casualty of the season) pasted upon a wet garden bench!
>
> But if the chink was a long glint of dewy brilliancy, then I made haste to have the window yield its treasure. With one blow, the room would be cleft into light and shade. The foliage of birches moving in the sun had the translucent green tone of grapes, and in contrast to this there was the dark velvet of fir trees against a blue of extraordinary intensity, the like of which I rediscovered only many years later, in the montane zone of Colorado.

The paired scenes – rainy day and sunny day – are actual recollections of repeated experiences, memory in an iterative tense, but they also offer themselves as a kind of allegory of perception and, by implication, of memory. The window (as often in fiction) is the transparent marker between inner and outer, between perceiver and scene; and the natural scene as a whole can be visually reconstructed from the bar of light emanating from it in through the shutters. Nabokov's temporal and spatial distance from the lost past is defined by that initial phrase, "the legendary Russia of my boyhood," but the virtuosity of the prose, moving from the chink of light to the nuanced illumination of the landscape, proceeds to abolish the distance. The "watery pallor" of the chink of light in the first paragraph leads the imagination of the observer to a witty image that summarizes the scene he prefers not to behold: "a sullen day sitting

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for its picture in a puddle." The wit says a good deal about observation and representation in Nabokov's imaginative world. It is not merely that the rain-puddle reflecting the gloomy sky is a synecdoche for the whole dreary scene but that framing and mirroring are the means of capturing the fleeting moment. It sometimes seems in Nabokov as though the data of experience were no more than the raw material of artistic representation, the majolica shards awaiting the expert hand that will assemble them in the wholeness of a pattern, and this sense is caught in the image of the rainy day posing for its picture in the puddle. The idea of a careful photographic composition in grays and dingy browns is then carried forward in the patently composed quality of the prose (quite unlike the next paragraph on the sunny day), which locks all the descriptive terms into a network of alliterated l's and s's and d's – "line of dull light," "leaden sky," "sodden sand," gruel-like/lilacs" – complemented by two subseries of b's and f's – "broken brown blossoms," "flat, fallow leaf." None of this can properly be described as onomatopoeic, but the effect is to proffer an illusion of all the words somehow being contaminated by the bleak light of the scene to which they belong, dissolving into one another in a gray impasto, a "gruel-like mess." One begins to see why Nabokov can imagine his prose as bronze rivets, holding pieces firmly together.

The paragraph on the bright day puts aside these artifices of phonetic orchestration partly for contrapuntal reasons, in order not to overdo a single device, and partly because, in this full frontal vision of the illuminated scene, the writer now wants to concentrate on the precise visual texture of what the light reveals, stressing painterly words instead of mood-evoking sound-clusters. The suddenness of the invasion of sunlight when the shutters are flung open is realized in a theatrical gesture, the metaphorical blow that cleaves the room into light and shade. Then we are invited by the chromatic specification of the language to look out the window with the young Vladimir on a visual composition – the delicately defined "translucent green tone of grapes" of the birch leaves set against "the dark velvet" of the fir and the intense blue of the sky. The last of these color-values is given neither a tone nor a texture but an emotive label ("extraordinary intensity"), perhaps because its location on the spectrum is to be inferred from its relation to the translucent green and the velvet darkness, perhaps because the intensity, confirmed by the rediscovery in Colorado, is the main point. One might note that the Proustian moment of involuntary memory, the unlooked-for recurrence of the sky over Vyra years later in the Sierras, is not the object of representation but an element in the rhetorical structure that fixes the vividness of the primary memory. Nabokov's cunning strangeness with English plays a strategic part in putting this final

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effect into place. An American would not say "the montane zone" but rather something like "mountain region." The locution, both perfectly correct and oddly foreign, acts to assimilate the mountains of Colorado with the Alps and with Russian topography, just as Nabokov's English in general flaunts its interlinguistic character, makes itself felt as a vehicle that can cross both geographical and temporal boundaries.

Where does the light come from that informs these scenes of memory? The example we have just considered might tempt us into a facile response, namely, that the distinctive quality of light was simply present in the original experience, to be recalled in its peculiar vividness by the lexically fortunate memoirist. Such recollection might follow the Proustian path of consciousness suddenly and happily invaded by the past. For Nabokov, however, the real light that once shone leaves only shadowy traces in the storehouse of memory. It can be recovered not through some spontaneous resurgence but through a careful formal reconstitution in another medium, that of art. It is instructive that light in *Speak, Memory* should be not only a defining presence in remembered scenes but also a recurrent image for art. In the first chapter, Nabokov, puzzling over the enigma of his own identity, speaks of "a certain intricate watermark whose unique design becomes visible when the lamp of art is made to shine through life's foolscap." This image of art as the illuminator of otherwise hidden patterns dovetails with the repeated representation of memory in the figure of the magic-lantern, as when Nabokov notes that the sundry tutors of his boyhood "appear within memory's luminous disc as so many magic-lantern projections." A magic-lantern, by putting light behind a colored transparency, transforms it into a larger illuminated image that, even in its necessary two-dimensionality, may seem enchantingly lifelike. Let us look briefly at a few selected slides from *Speak, Memory* to see how Nabokov performs this trick by a delicate positioning of the lamp of his art.

One of the oddest images conjured up in the autobiography is the view from the dining room at the Vyra manor of Nabokov's father being tossed in a blanket outside by his servants. It is not sufficient to pigeonhole this moment as an instance of the technique of defamiliarization of which Nabokov was pastmaster, because the arabesque movement of the prose also leads to a perception of the intimate and paradoxical liaison between presence and absence, life and death, reality and art.

> Thrice, to the mighty heave-ho of his invisible tossers, he would fly up in this fashion, and the second time he would go higher than the first and then there he would be, on his last and loftiest flight, reclining, as if for good, against the cobalt blue of the summer noon, like one of those paradisiac personages who comfortably soar, with such a wealth of folds in their garments, on the vaulted ceiling of a

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> church while below, one by one, the wax tapers in mortal hands light up to make a swarm of minute flames of incense, and the priest chants of eternal repose, and funeral lilies conceal the face of whoever lies there, among the swimming lights, in the open coffin.

Nabokov's prose often has the look of working out carefully calculated effects, but here, one may venture to guess, he seems to have given himself over to the free-associative momentum of metaphor, and with startling consequences. The narration of the father tossed in a blanket by boisterous peasants ends — it is also the chapter-ending — in a kind of freeze-frame that stresses the timeless thereness ("there he would be") of the horizontal figure "reclining" against the summer sky "as if for good." Father, day, and year, are all at a lofty stillpoint (it is noon, and close to the summer solstice). Characteristically, Nabokov realizes this moment in part through recourse to a painterly term, "the cobalt blue of the summer noon." This immediately leads associatively to the elaborate simile of the painted image of the divine or saintly figures on the church ceiling. That simile is "Homeric" not merely in its length but in its power to effect a large movement between two disparate realms. The living image of the father in midair is transposed into painting on plaster, the painted figures linked with a more ecclesiastic paradise than the boy experienced in his childhood world. In a macabre turn of wit, the wonderful suspension on air turns into the "eternal repose" of the priestly chant, and with the rightness of dream-logic, the dead person's face is concealed. As the perspective moves from life to iconography and from outside to inside, the lighting appropriately switches from solar brilliance to flickering wax tapers that cast their faint gleam, as we spiral down through the last clause from ceiling to ground, on an open coffin. This concluding image of a body recumbent in death does not, I think, subvert or cancel the image of a splendidly living body recumbent in air, as one school of contemporary criticism would automatically conclude. What it seems to me to do is to add a dimension of terrible poignancy to the captured timeless moment of the soaring father. As surely as the memoirist is aware that his father was cut down by an assassin's bullet in 1922, he knows, and his figurative language dramatizes visually, that the cobalt blue of the remembered summer sky is drawn against a shadowy background of extinction — precisely like the crack of light at the beginning of the book set between two eternities of darkness.

Memories of a happy, forever lost childhood can easily decline into the cheap coin of nostalgia. What partly makes *Speak, Memory* one of the most remarkable of modern autobiographies is Nabokov's ability to etch in prose the precious vividness of his past while keeping steadily in

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mind the necessary fate it shares with every human past of being swallowed up by oblivion. Only the intervention of art grants it the grace of a radiant afterlife, but that is, ineluctably, different in kind from the first life. Instructively, at the end of Chapter Three, Nabokov fleetingly evokes an infinite regress of adults remembering childhood. Rereading the sentimental juvenile fiction of a certain Mme de Ségur, née Rostopchine, he relives his own boyhood when he first read these books, and in a painful doubling, he remembers his Uncle Ruka reading Mme de Ségur back in 1908 and reliving *his* boyhood.

> I see again my schoolroom in Vyra, the blue roses of the wallpaper, the open window. Its reflection fills the oval mirror above the leathern couch where my uncle sits, gloating over a tattered book. A sense of security, of well-being, of summer warmth pervades my memory. That robust reality makes a ghost of the present. The mirror brims with brightness; a bumblebee has entered the room and bumps against the ceiling. Everything is as it should be, nothing will ever change, nobody will ever die.

Again, a window, light from the outside, and a mirror – this last, a Nabokov trademark – make the scene cohere. As in our previous illustration, the power of the memory is brought out in a play between presence and absence, life and death, but the rhetorical balance here is quite different. The sheer happiness of the remembered experience is explicitly announced, and the memoirist goes as far as to reverse the usual categories of presence and absence: "That robust reality makes a ghost of the present." The robustness is mysteriously reinforced by the alliterated r's, while the assimilation through near-rhyme of "robust" and "ghost" draws us into a somewhat disorienting semantic shell game: it is the past, after all, that is a ghost, but a robust one that makes what we usually call reality seem spectral. The final focus on the paired images of the sun-flooded mirror and the bumblebee is articulated with a Tennysonian musicality, emphatically clustering m's and b's and r's in a pattern of sound that turns into an onomatopoeic evocation of the buzzing, bumping bumblebee. The more important effect, however, of the phonetic interfusion of words in this penultimate sentence is to convey in the bronze rivets of prose a sense of all the elements of an experienced moment beautifully, timelessly locked together. But the last sentence – "Everything is as it should be, nothing will ever change, nobody will ever die" – is disquietingly double-edged. It hovers precariously between a rapturous proclamation and an anguished *cri de coeur*. On one level, it is a true declaration – on the level every reader can experience in the stylistic success of an undying memory crystallized in language that makes

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the wallpaper, the uncle, the book, and the mirror brimming with brightness live on. But both narrator and reader are also acutely aware that the final sentence is flagrantly contrary to existential fact: each of these affirmations is necessarily shadowed by a negation, for nothing remains as it should be, everything always changes, everyone dies.

The more one ponders this enchanting book, the more evident it becomes that Nabokov's conception of memory is profoundly – and appropriately – ambiguous. In the same breath, he intimates that he has recovered or somehow reconstituted the past in his prose, and that he has rather reinvented a past forever lost in the vanishing perspective of time. To affirm merely the former would be to succumb to self-indulgent delusion; to affirm merely the latter would be to concede that autobiography is impossible because it must always turn into fiction. He defines "the supreme achievement of memory" as "the masterly use it makes of innate harmonies when gathering to its fold the suspended and wandering tonalities of the past." The adjective "innate" here hovers indeterminately. The structure of experience may involve innate harmonies, as Nabokov seems to propose in his sundry remarks on pattern. Alternately, there may be an aesthetic order, distinct from experience as such, which has its intrinsic harmonies – the consonance of images, the pleasing recurrences of sound – and these may be exploited by artful consciousness to pull together the disparate fragments of experience. He tends toward the first alternative, which makes the act of autobiographical recovery a triumphant reality, but he repeatedly allows for the second alternative as well, in which autobiography is perforce an artifice offering a kind of luminous compensation for the unrecoverable past.

Nabokov's evocation of the initial trip of his Swiss governess, "Mademoiselle," from the rural train station to the family estate vividly illustrates this delicate ambiguity. It contains features shared by most of the examples we have considered – an emphatically defined source of natural illumination, mirror imagery, painterly elements of composition – and provides a nice nocturnal complement to the sunlit scenes we have looked at:

> Every now and then, she looks back to make sure that a second sleigh, bearing her trunk and hatbox, is following – always at the same distance, like those companionable phantoms of ships in polar waters which explorers have described. And let me not leave out the moon – for surely there must be a moon, the full, incredibly clear disc that goes so well with Russian lusty frosts. So there it comes, steering out of a flock of small dappled clouds, which it tinges with a vague iridescence; and, as it sails higher, it glazes the runner tracks left on the road, where every sparkling lump of snow is emphasized by a swollen shadow.

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> Very lovely, very lonesome. But what am I doing in this stereoscopic dreamland? How did I get here? Somehow, the two sleighs have slipped away, leaving behind a passportless spy standing on the blue-white road in his New England snowboots and storm-coat. The vibration in my ears is no longer their receding bells, but only my own blood singing. All is still, spellbound, enthralled by the moon, fancy's rear-vision mirror. The snow is real, though, and as I bend to it and scoop up a handful, sixty years crumble to glittering frost-dust between my fingers.

In this instance, the status of the recalled scene as sheer invention is flaunted from the start. In actuality, the child Vladimir was back at the Vyra manor when this moonlit ride took place, and so Nabokov the memoirist must recreate it as a fiction writer from Mademoiselle's point of view, to a large extent using the clues of literary convention. The following sleigh is wittily represented as a counterpart to those "companionable phantoms of ships" sighted by polar explorers, and the shimmer of oscillation between phantom or hallucination and real thing runs through the whole scene. The moon cannot be left out, the narrator ostentatiously announces, and it is thus introduced with suitable theatricality ("So there it comes"), providing iridescence for the clouds, glitter and melodramatic shadows for the snow.

This magical landscape collapses with the interjection, "Very lovely, very lonesome." It has all been a "stereoscopic dreamland," a term that suggests still another guide of artifice for the composition of the scene – the old stereoscopes with their "picturesque" black and white views that were a common home amusement in the world of Nabokov's childhood. The Russia of 1906, in a kind of cinematic *faux raccord* (the opposite of a Proustian concordance), disappears into a New England winterscape decades later in which the expatriate writer, "a passportless spy" on the remembered Mademoiselle, is equally exiled from his homeland and his past. But even here, the act of imaginative recollection is dialectic. The New England moon is "fancy's rear-vision mirror." As the chronophobic, chronophiliac imagination looks "back" into it, the moon becomes the moon of 1906, no mere mechanism of *faux raccord*, and, in the last emblematic gesture, sixty years crumble to frost-dust, dreamworld and real world change places.

The obtruded paradox of this extreme instance is submerged but implicit in most of the evoked scenes of *Speak, Memory*. The memory of Mademoiselle's sleigh-ride is an invention, directed by the principles of internal coherence and mimetic aptness of literary, painterly, and perhaps photographic artifice. And yet, artifice, whether dealing with past or present, is our principal means of crystallizing experience, making it

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emotionally and aesthetically assimilable precisely by playing up those "innate harmonies." The moon is a literary stage-prop and still the real moon seen by a wide-eyed child in the winter sky over Vyra in 1906, just as the chill touch of snow is real, then and now.

Few imaginative writers have been so committed as Nabokov to the ideal of conscious control. In his autobiography he often evinces a sense that he can actually stage a return to the past by a sufficiently deft and resourceful ordering of his prose medium. But there is also an aspect of Proustian involuntarism stalking this project of artful volition. The scene of memory invoked, whether actual recollection or invention or a subtle compound of the two, picks up an experiential charge from the present, sets up a circulation between past and present that is not strictly determined by artistic calculation. This, indeed, is why *Speak, Memory* is not simply a series of virtuoso tricks in constructing the past but rather a haunting expression of what it means to live in time, circling back on the past, intimately bound to it, yet also forever exiled in another, later world.

Robert Motherwell
1915-1991

We are saddened by the death
of a valued friend and early contributor

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ARTHUR SCHLESINGER, JR.

A Dissent on Multicultural Education

I agree with many of the practical recommendations in the report of the New York State Social Studies Syllabus Review Committee. It is unquestionably necessary to diversify the syllabus in order to meet the needs of a more diversified society. It is unquestionably necessary to provide for global education in an increasingly interdependent world. Our students should by all means be better acquainted with women's history, with the history of ethnic and racial minorities, with Latin American, Asian, and African history. Debate, alternative interpretations, "multiple perspectives" are all essential to the educational enterprise. I welcome changes that would adapt the curriculum to these purposes. If that is what the report means by multicultural education, I am all for it.

But I fear that the report implies much more than this. The underlying philosophy of the report, as I read it, is that ethnicity is the defining experience for most Americans, that ethnic ties are permanent and indelible, that the division into ethnic groups establishes the basic structure of American society, and that a main objective of public education should be the protection, strengthening, celebration, and perpetuation of ethnic origins and identities. Implicit in the report is the classification of all Americans according to ethnic and racial criteria.

These propositions are assumed rather than argued in the report. They constitute an ethnic interpretation of American history that, like the economic interpretation, is valid up to a point but misleading and wrong when presented as the whole picture.

The ethnic interpretation, moreover, reverses the historic theory of America – which has been not the preservation and sanctification of old cultures and identities but the creation of a *new* national culture and a *new* national identity. As Secretary of State John Quincy Adams told a German contemplating migration to these shores, those who would settle in America must recognize one necessity: "They must cast off the European skin, never to resume it. They must look forward to their posterity rather than backward to their ancestors."

Of course students should learn more about the rich variety of peoples and cultures that have forged this new American identity. They also should understand the curse of racism – the great failure of the American experiment, the glaring contradiction of American ideals and the still crippling disease of American society. But we should also be alert to the danger of a society divided into distinct and immutable ethnic and racial groups, each taught to cherish its own apartness from the rest.

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While I favor curricular changes that make for more inclusive interpretations of past and present, I do not believe that we should magnify ethnic and racial themes at the expense of the unifying ideals that precariously hold our highly differentiated society together. The republic has survived and grown because it has maintained a balance between *pluribus* and *unum*. The report, it seems to me, is saturated with *pluribus* and neglectful of *unum*.

The first paragraph of the preamble notes that "no other country in the world is peopled by a greater variety of races, nationalities, and ethnic groups." It continues: "But although the United States has been a great asylum for diverse peoples, it has not always been a great refuge for diverse cultures." Both points are correct – but the report is oblivious to the historical fact that the second sentence explains the first.

Why has the United States been thus far exempt from the "trends toward separation and dissolution" that, as the report later notes, are having such destructive effects in the Soviet Union, South Africa, Canada, Yugoslavia, Spain, and the United Kingdom? The report replies with general statements about diversity as a source of strength. But diversity has plainly not been a source of strength in the Soviet Union, South Africa, Canada, and so on. Why has it been a source of strength in the United States?

Obviously the reason why the United States, for all its manifest failure to live up to its own ideals, is still the most successful large multiethnic nation is precisely *because*, instead of emphasizing and perpetuating ethnic separatism, it has assimilated immigrant cultures into a new *American* culture.

Most immigrants indeed came to America precisely in order to escape their pasts. They *wanted* to become Americans and to participate in the making of an American culture and an American national identity. Even black Americans, who came as involuntary immigrants and have suffered – still suffer – awful persecution and discrimination, have made vital contributions to the American culture in which they have grown up and of which they are an indispensable part.

The preamble rejects "previous ideals of assimilation to an Anglo-American model." Of course America derives its language and its primary political purposes and institutions from Great Britain. To pretend otherwise is to falsify history. To teach otherwise is to mislead our students. But the British legacy has been modified, enriched, and reconstituted by the absorption of non-Anglo cultures and traditions as well as by the distinctive experiences of American life. That is why America today is so very different a nation from Britain. Assimilation does not equal Anglo-conformity.

But the report goes on to reject the very ideal of assimilation. I

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recognize that 'assimilation' is a word that many now find upsetting. Even 'integration' seems to be out of fashion. The report does on occasion refer in general terms to the need for *unum* as well as for *pluribus*. The preamble observes, "Special attention will need to be given to those values, characteristics, and traditions which we share in common." I do not, however, find this concern much reflected in the body of the report or in the proposals for syllabus revision. Part II begins by describing "the search for common cultural grounds" as "more important than ever." This comment, if true, should give that search a much higher priority than it receives in the report. Buried toward the end is a comment on the importance of examining with care "what the elements are that hold together a nation or culture in spite of what are often great differences. This surely is one of the central questions to be considered in any course in American history." It surely is, but it is a central question that receives practically no attention in the proposals for curricular revision.

A basic question is involved: should public education seek to make our young boys and girls contributors to a common American culture? Or should it strengthen and perpetuate separate ethnic and racial subcultures? The report places its emphasis on cultivating and reinforcing ethnic differences. Students, the report says, should be "continually" encouraged to ask themselves what their cultural heritage is, why they should be proud of it: "Why should I develop an understanding of and respect for my own culture(s), language(s), religion, and national origin(s)?" Would it not be more appropriate for students to be "continually" encouraged to understand the American culture in which they are growing up and to prepare for an active role in shaping that culture?

Am I wrong in sensing a certain artificiality and inauthenticity in all this? If the ethnic subcultures had genuine vitality, they would be sufficiently instilled in children by family, church, and community. It is surely not the office of the public school to promote ethnic separatism and heighten ethnic tensions.

Should public education move in this direction, it will only increase the fragmentation, resegregation and self-ghettoization of American life. The bonds of national cohesion in the republic are sufficiently fragile already. Public education should aim to strengthen those bonds, not to weaken them. Of course Americans should be free (as they have always been, and have often done) to cultivate ancestral customs and traditions. But the function of the schools is surely to teach what holds Americans together as well as to teach what sets them apart. The alternative to integration is disintegration.

What has held Americans together in the absence of a common ethnic origin has been the creation of a new American identity – a distinctive American culture based on a common language and common

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adherence to ideals of democracy and human rights, a culture to which many nationalities and races have made emphatic contributions in the past and will (one hopes) make emphatic contributions in the future. Our democratic ideals have been imperfectly realized, but the long labor to achieve them and to move the American experiment from exclusion to participation has been a central theme of American history. It should be a central theme of the New York social studies curriculum.

And it is important for students to understand where these democratic ideals come from. They come of course from Europe. Indeed, Europe is the *unique* source of these ideals – ideals that today empower people in every continent and to which today most of the world aspires. That is why it is so essential (in my view) to acquaint students with the Western history and tradition that created our democratic ideals – and why it is so wrong to tell students of non-European origin that Western ideals are not for them.

I regret the note of Europhobia that sometimes emerges in vulgar attacks on "Eurocentric" curricula. Certainly Europe, like every other culture, has committed its share of crimes. But, unlike most cultures, it has also generated ideals that have opposed and exposed those crimes.

The report, however, plays up the crimes and plays down the ideals. Thus, when it talks about the European colonization of Africa and India, it deplores "the eradication of many varieties of traditional culture and knowledge." Like infanticide? Slavery? Polygamy? Subjection of women? *Suttee*? Veil-wearing? Foot-binding? Clitoridectomies? Nothing is said about the influence of European ideas of democracy, human rights, self-government, rule of law.

Even Karl Marx was fairer to European colonization than that. "England," Marx said, "has to fulfil a double mission in India: one destructive, the other regenerating – the annihilation of old Asiatic society, and the laying of the material foundations of Western society in Asia. . . . The question is, can mankind fulfill its destiny without a fundamental revolution in the social state of Asia? If not, whatever may have been the crimes of England she was the unconscious tool of history in bringing about the revolution."

I also am doubtful about the note occasionally sounded in the report that "students must be taught social criticism" and "see themselves as active makers and changers of culture and society" and "promote economic fairness and social justice" and "bring about change in their communities, the nation, and the world." I very much hope that, as citizens, students will do all these things, but I do not think it is the function of the schools to teach students to become reformers any more than I ever thought it the function of the schools to teach them the beauty of private enterprise and the sanctity of the status quo. I will be satisfied if we

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can teach children to read, write, and calculate. If students understand the nature of our Western democratic tradition, they will move into social criticism on their own. But let us not politicize the curriculum on behalf of either the left or the right.

I recognize that I am very much in the minority in these comments. But given basic philosophical disagreements with the report, I cannot conscientiously go along with my colleagues. I respect their serious concern and their devoted labor, and I have enjoyed my association with them. I would only beg them to consider what kind of nation we will have if we press further down the road to cultural separatism and ethnic fragmentation, if we institutionalize the classification of our citizens by ethnic and racial criteria, and if we abandon our historic commitment to an American identity. What will hold our people together then?

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PHILIPPE RAYNAUD

Feminism and the *Ancien Régime*

The exhaustion of French revolutionary passions over the past decade has given new life to an idea once dear to nineteenth-century liberals and to Alexis de Tocqueville in particular. Those liberals maintained that since certain essential and disturbing traits of the French Revolution were inherited from the *ancien régime* – its arrogance, its authoritarianism, its cult of heroism – then the stabilization of what Tocqueville called the "democratic spirit" would depend heavily on overcoming the "revolutionary spirit," since the latter is so deeply infused with the worst aspects of the "aristocratic spirit."

One wonders whether the abandonment of these antidemocratic "spirits" is either possible or desirable in France today. I think especially of the paradoxical way they have survived and developed simultaneously in the French political tradition to produce an intricate web of customs and institutions that are intimately connected in the minds and habits of the French themselves, and especially in their passions. French history offers many examples, such as the development of public law and of the secular republican school system, that reveal the distinctive mix of French passions and "spirits" to be not necessarily less favorable to democracy than the mores of other, reputedly more "natural," democratic cultures. To support such an interpretation I propose here to leave political history behind, though, and to venture instead onto a riskier path leading to the far more intimate domain of male-female relations. It is a commonplace that relations between French men and women are indeed different from those in other democratic countries, a difference usually attributed to some archaic holdover from the *ancien régime*. But a closer look at the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries shows us how the development of relations between the sexes down to our day has deeply marked the history of French democracy itself.

It is no secret that feminism as a doctrine and as a culture is relatively weak in France compared to its obvious vigor in the United States or (in different ways) in West Germany. Of course, in the 1970s there was a very active and militant feminist movement in France which had many achievements to its credit, notably liberalizing contraception and abortion. There have always been eminent French women writers greatly admired in the United States as representatives of "women's writing," and even in the French university there is a strong interest in women's history. But the ideological enterprise called "women's studies" found on

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American campuses – devoted to rereading all Western history from the viewpoint of women, or, more broadly, to reforming the "canon" of Western culture in order to break the domination of sexist male writers – this sort of feminism seems frankly unthinkable in France today.

More important still, in my view, are the different *sensibilities* expressed by French and Anglo-Saxon feminism. In terms of clothing, young French women continue to play the seduction game; the miniskirt is considered sexy, not sexist, and a boycott of it (as recently took place in the United States) would be the subject of ridicule in France. In terms of family life, although French couples do seek to share their burdens more equally now, there is still a clear distinction between the duties of mothers and fathers. And even French psychoanalysis, whatever school or movement one chooses, remains ever faithful to the most "phallocentric" aspects of Freud's theories.

Nonetheless, despite these differences, it cannot be said that the women's emancipation movement (to use an old phrase) has had less political success in France than elsewhere. Equal opportunity to jobs and education are now well established here, and one notes that it is in the United States and Germany that the rights to abortion and birth control are being challenged today, not in France. These achievements must be credited to the French republican tradition and not to any other French peculiarity: abortion was liberalized through parliament (not the courts), and equal opportunity in education and employment are defended by a centralized state that standardizes public employment, social services, and education throughout the country. If there is a French "exception" in this regard its roots are not in differing conceptions of political equality or institutional equality. In my view, it arises rather more from a profound difference in passions and social roles – in what might be called the *économie passionnelle française*.

Perhaps the subtlest modern writer to plumb this *économie* was David Hume, who was particularly well placed to understand it. Rather critical of his own society, Hume was able to recognize the distinctive grandeur of French society; equally skeptical of French rationalism, he could also see what the republic of letters owed to the pre-Enlightenment world. His lucidity is especially apparent in his essay, "On the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences," where he reflects on the social conditions of "civilization" and the interdependence of law, moderate customs and habits, and progress in science and the arts.

In this essay Hume remarks that "it is impossible for the arts and sciences to arise, at first, among any people unless that people enjoy the blessing of a free government," and he also sees their intimate connection with the development of commerce. But Hume also adds an important nuance to this somewhat traditional Anglo-Scottish view. He writes that,

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although the arts may be transplanted into almost any state, "a republic is most favourable to the growth of the sciences, a civilized monarchy to that of the polite arts." This insight is of capital importance, for it shows that Hume understands the peculiar virtue of the English constitution, which manages to keep an equilibrium between the monarchic, aristocratic spirits and the democratic spirits. He was not insensitive to civilized virtues of those continental monarchies of which France was the classic example:

> Where power rises upwards from the people to the great, as in all republics, such refinements of civility are apt to be little practiced; since the whole state is by that means brought near to a level, and every member of it is rendered, in a great measure, independent of another. The people have the advantage, by the authority of their suffrages: the great by the superiority of their station. But in a civilized monarchy, there is a long train of dependence from the prince to the peasant, which is not great enough to render property precarious, or depress the minds of the people; but is sufficient to beget in every one an inclination to please his superiors, and to form himself upon these models, which are most acceptable to people of condition and education. Politeness of manners, therefore, arise most naturally in monarchies and courts; and where that flourishes, none of the liberal arts will be altogether neglected or despised.

This modern "politeness," whose advantages and disadvantages are now the inverse of those arising from "ancient simplicity," produces two distinctive notions found in "courts and monarchies": they are "gallantry" and "honor." If one holds honor to be above the common understanding of honesty it simply serves to cover vices; but if one comes to understand it as a demand for loyalty, it then becomes, Hume writes, "an essential part of morality." Gallantry, on the other hand, is a virtue because it compensates for the inequality between the sexes with "politeness, respect, and generosity." Hume was obviously defending the natural superiority of men, though he adds that, "among a polite people, the male sex discover their authority in a more generous, though not a less evident manner" than among the barbarians. Still, like Burke, Hume was trying to explain the fact that, through the development of manners, courtly society developed a particular form of sexual equality. And for Hume it is certainly true that such artificial and imaginative effects of civilization are far more important than any supposedly "natural" sexual differences.

If Hume managed to paint the most seductive portrait of gallantry's beneficial effects, it was undoubtedly Rousseau who denounced most

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vigorously the corrupting effects of the feminization of modern morals under aristocracy. In his *Letter to d'Alembert* he wrote, ". . . this disadvantage which degrades man is everywhere great; but states like our own [Geneva] must especially guard against it. A monarch may be rather indifferent to whether he governs men or women so long as he is obeyed; but in a republic one needs men." In this disagreement between two of the eighteenth century's greatest minds one sees previewed the great revolutionary drama in which the aristocracy's "civilization of manners" was to be rejected in favor of an imaginary heroism whose natural counterpart was a relatively narrow conception of feminine virtue.

But even here it is hard to treat the revolution as a radical break with the absolutist and aristocratic *ancien régime*, as the naive discovery of the chasm that always exists between civilized and civic virtues. This is clear when we consider the leaders of the revolution itself: Mirabeau, the first great tribune, was a living example of aristocratic corruption; Saint-Just, the archangel of terror, began as a libertine poet; Robespierre, the idol of the *sans-culottes*, wore a wig; Danton was a dissipated hedonist; and so on. And when we review the manner in which the literature of the nineteenth century was later to treat the passions, we note that it habitually mixed memories of the revolution and the *ancien régime* in order to make common cause against the dull prose of the bourgeois world – that is, against modern democracy itself. This double strategy – now *révolutionnaire*, now *réactionnaire* – is nowhere more evident than in the works of Madame de Staël, Stendahl, and Flaubert.

As admirers of England and the Whig tradition, French liberals of the nineteenth century rejected both the tradition of aristocratic absolutism and the heroic fantasies of Jacobinism and Napolean's Empire; in this sense they were somewhere between Rousseau's imaginary heroism and Hume's rather conservative skepticism. Madame de Staël was, along with Benjamin Constant, a foremost defender of "modern" over "ancient" liberty and a disenchanted yet faithful child of the Enlightenment. But her distinctive contribution to French liberal doctrine lies in her reflections of the condition of women and their rapport with literature. Her "feminism," such as it was, was unlike Condorcet's, for she insisted less on the common reasonable nature of men and women than on woman's singular contribution to civilization. It is therefore perfectly natural that she would simultaneously praise England's political institutions, its literature, and its treatment of women. England, she wrote in *On Literature* in 1800, owes the quality of its novels specifically to the relations of its men and women:

> The existence of women, in England, is the principal cause of the in-

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> exhaustible profundity of English writers. . . . The relations between men and women are multiplied infinitely by sensibility and delicacy. . . . Nowhere as in England have women enjoyed the happiness provided by domestic affections. . . . England is the country where women are the most truly loved.

Even in this work of 1800, though, Madame de Staël's praise is discretely tempered by that of the culture and elegance of the French. But it is really in her posthumously published *Considerations on the French Revolution* (1818) that the difficulties of women's emancipation in both countries are most eloquently expressed. Here she speaks the language of both Rousseau and Hume, as it were, claiming that the price of political liberty was the subordination of women, and that the French monarchy had offered women an incomparable place within it:

> In England, women never enter into the conversation; the men have never accustomed them to taking part in general discussions; when the women retire after dinner the conversation only grows more animated. . . . In this respect, the women are extremely timid, since in a free state men take over their natural dignity and women feel themselves subordinated.
>
> This is not the case in an arbitrary monarchy like the one that existed in France, because nothing was impossible and nothing was fixed. The conquests of grace were boundless, and women were able to triumph naturally in such combats.

This was a central issue in Madame de Staël's works, one through which she expressed the ideas she shared with Benjamin Constant. By using the condition of women as a striking example, she memorably showed that, however perfect modern emancipation is, it never realizes its full promise because the liberated individual is never fully happy and never overcomes his or her own anxiety. As Hegel, the master theorist of reconciliation, would later put it, woman always remains the "eternal irony of the community."

Madame de Staël, the most reasonably liberal woman writer of the nineteenth century, never renounced herself either to the (male) heroic imaginings of the revolution, or to embellished memories of the court. Nonetheless, the "courtesan" and "heroic" models of love continued throughout nineteenth-century French literature, as we see both in a quasi-Jacobin like Stendhal and a more conservative artist like Flaubert. In Stendhal, whose political radicalism was matched with a certain distrust for what might be called "American-style" democracy, young men love the aristocratic qualities of women, who, in return, love in them

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anything but the modest virtues of modern liberty. ("Is he another Danton?," Mathilde de la Môle asks herself when comparing Julien Sorel to the bland young men of good society.) When, on the other hand, Flaubert evokes Emma Bovary's youth, it is to recall her fascination for the gallantry of centuries past and for the loves of the old Duke of Laverdière.

Beyond any manifest political divisions, what French literature of the nineteenth century displays is less a simple nostalgia for an aristocratic or revolutionary past than a continual effort to prevent the post-revolutionary world (bourgeois or democratic) from falling into boredom or immobility by taking itself to be the end of history or nature's highest achievement. And although it would be futile to extract a specific program for reforming manners and passions from the aspirations expressed in the novels, in the poetry, or in the lives of artists during this period, one does note the search for a certain *stylization* appropriate to modern life. Whether this search for a modern style bears any relation to the subsequent development of modern French society is difficult to gauge; but when one compares the histories of women's emancipation and feminism in France and the United States, one cannot help noticing a certain French exceptionalism that may be reflected in these literary developments.

In the United States, for example, the emancipation of women was rooted in the particular structure of American families, which, from the colonial and revolutionary periods, progressively weakened traditional patriarchy in a society that had also rejected "aristocratic" ideals such as gallantry. But it was especially in the nineteenth century, from the 1850s to the end of the Civil War, that American feminism acquired its most remarkable characteristics: it began as a radical but respectable movement among abolitionists whose demands soon influenced a rather large group of urban bourgeois women. In France, on the contrary, the first feminists played much more provocative roles as artists (George Sand) and activists in socialist and revolutionary movements. This was far more difficult, since it was necessary for these women both to overcome the relatively narrow perspective of their privileged artistic (and often aristocratic) surroundings, and to find a place in a political sphere which, at least since the age of Proudhon and the revolutionary unionists, nourished a strong masculine cult of heroes. Despite its long refusal to grant women's suffrage, the French republic would also play a certain role in later extensions of sexual equality – notably in the slow assimilation of women into the school system – but such advances were much more the fruit of central state action than of independent social movements, as in the United States.

Among its most radical representatives, American feminism finds its

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strength in the perpetual American obsessions with their natural equality of condition; this natural success also helps explain the rather strict intellectual limitations of American feminism regarding the passions. French emancipatory movements, by contrast, have always had to find their place and style in the world of quasi-aristocratic literary salons, the heroic mythology of revolutionary movements (distinctly patriarchal among the Communists), and the standardization of the republican state. Perhaps this is why there is still a trace of irony in France that helps to preserve the difference between the sexes without renouncing demands for political justice and dignity. And, indeed, this may be the most desirable and intelligent way to reconcile the revolutionary imagination with an aristocratic heritage and democratic aspirations. In the United States, the natural home of equality of condition, feminism has become only the most recent, not to say most dour and cantankerous, banner under which traditional democratic demands now march. In France, the land of absolutism, women instead have managed to give revolutionary passions the most human of faces.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH BY MARK LILLA

Herbert Ferber
1906-1991

We are saddened by the death
of an old friend and early contributor

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SUSAN DUNN AND ROBERT F. DALZELL, JR.

Revolutionary Myths in France and America

In 1989 the world was treated to elaborate celebrations of two historical events, both presumed to be of towering significance. In this country the bicentenary of George Washington's inauguration as President – and hence the commencement of government under the Constitution of 1787 – was marked by a full-dress reenactment of the ceremony itself, replete with quantities of apt commentary, and in France the stupendous commemoration of the start of the French Revolution came and went. Though hardly for the first time, the jostling together of these celebrations in a single year raised some tantalizing questions about the comparability of the American and French Revolutions. As events, what, if anything, did they have in common? And what of their legacies? What vision, what enduring symbols, were future generations in each country able to draw from the experience of revolution? With today's news once again full of talk of "revolution," some answers to these questions may indeed be useful – as antidotes, if nothing else.

Certainly on the face of it – as Americans are apt to note with a distinct air of self-congratulation – the American and French Revolutions could not have been more different. One conceived politics as rational debate and compromise, the other as the decapitation of adversaries: one was followed by decades of political stability, the other by a turbulent succession of empires, restorations, and failed republics. Moreover the myths created by the two revolutions mirrored those differences. Even before he was chosen President, George Washington stood as an exemplary figure whose idealized character provided a compelling model of integrity, duty, and responsibility. The operative myth in revolutionary France, on the other hand, quickly became the cult of unrestrained vengeance – a new absolute in a country long accustomed to absolutism.

Yet despite the obvious differences, there remained important similarities. Both revolutions were products of the Enlightenment, and neither – finally – produced a viable political settlement. Although it seems clear in the French case that any hope for political stability was doomed by a mythology of vengeance, we sometimes forget that the American Revolution also failed to secure the nation on an enduring foundation. Even the admirable and inspiring myth of George Washington was not infinitely malleable. By the middle of the nineteenth century the institution of slavery had produced a moral and political crisis in the United

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States that no simple translation or reinterpretation of Enlightenment revolutionary symbols could resolve. Ultimately on both sides of the Atlantic, nationhood would come to be based, not on the acceptance of a rational social contract, or on notions of civic virtue, but on an entirely new vision of emotional communion among citizens bound together by shared suffering and self-sacrifice. For better or worse, too, we live with that vision still.

* * *

That any of this should have been so in the American case would have astonished the anxious men who, early in the summer of 1776, set their signatures to the Declaration of Independence. Most of them wanted nothing so much as a return to the political system they had known before Parliament decided to bypass colonial legislatures and tax Americans directly. As they envisioned their "revolution," it was to be truly "a circuit around a central axis, ending at the point from whence the motion began." This was the commonly understood meaning of the word at the time – before, that is, the French Revolution changed forever its significance. Nor did the achievement of nationhood in the modern sense rank high on the signers' agenda. What concerned them far more was the question of who would govern a liberated United States of America.

If the Declaration itself is less than clear on some of these points, it does not totally mask them either. It is in fact a curiously schizophrenic document. First and last, there are the wonderful phrases that would enshrine for all time a breathtaking vision of unalienable rights and sacred liberties. Yet squarely in the middle of those phrases comes the long section on "abuses and usurpations" – the legal brief, documenting the multiple transgressions committed by George III against his American subjects. And if the one set of statements stands as a ringing affirmation of all that free men can do to shape their own destinies, the other seems to take exactly the opposite tack. For in paragraph after paragraph, item after item, the King is shown as violating customary practice, disrupting the proper functioning of long established – and deeply cherished – political institutions.

Simply put, George III's great crime was that he had rendered government in America impossible on anything like its traditional basis. So ran the argument in the Declaration, and by extension revolution had become necessary precisely because it offered the only hope of restoring the country's legislatures and its courts, its laws and its lawmakers, to their full and proper authority. The truth was, however, that for men like the signers – most of whom were accustomed to playing key roles in those same legislatures and courts – such a "restoration" was hardly a matter of abstract principle alone. Their own political power was very

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much at stake.

Here, then, was a subtext of no small importance. To be sure, the idea that governments could be whatever free people chose to make them remained to dazzle in all its Enlightenment brilliance, but if nothing else, the logic inherent in the list of grievances introduced an element of tension by suggesting that in America, at least, the question of the proper form of government had already been answered. The Revolution needed only to confirm that happy fact; new answers were not required.

But of course new answers were forthcoming anyway – a veritable flood of them. And the managers of the Revolution did have the great good sense to realize that some degree of accommodation was essential. The clock of state could not be made to stand still in such perilous times; even less could it be turned back to 1765. Concessions had to be made to the widespread demand for greater popular participation in government, if for no other reason than because the revolutionary leadership lacked the means to resist them. All of its troops and most of its political clout were committed to defeating the British. That had to come first.

Yet what could not be suppressed could still perhaps be guided. With proper tutoring, men tasting political power for the first time in state constitutional conventions or newly expanded state legislatures – to say nothing of those who elected them – might learn to restrain their baser passions for the sake of the general good. And to make the lessons more palatable, real life examples of the sort of high moral character that was wanted could be provided, examples which would serve as models, shaping belief and behavior alike. As it turned out, too, the most useful example by far – the one richest in instructional possibilities, the figure endlessly held up for his countrymen's admiration in editorials and sermons – was the Commander of the Continental Army itself, General George Washington.

Recently a number of historians have stressed the lengths to which Washington himself sometimes went in manipulating appearances to suit his own ends. In this view, the "image" that he projected was a highly conscious creation, and a creation first and foremost of his own design. Unquestionably there is an element of truth here. The man who – while the issue of the command of the army was being debated in 1775 – chose to attend sessions of the Continental Congress in his Virginia colonel's uniform, was hardly above self-promotion. But as Pauline Maure has argued, if Washington became a model of a particular kind of republican virtue, it was not without first believing wholeheartedly *himself* in the values and standards of conduct that model embodied. His refusal to accept any monetary compensation for his services during the Revolution was at once a calculated gesture and a matter of deep, per-

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sonal conviction. He genuinely felt that a public trust should not be the source of private financial gain.

And it was just such selflessness that Americans needed to see and emulate – at least in the opinion of many of the country's leaders. Fortunately, throughout the war Washington continued to oblige by providing any number of examples of that and other highly desirable virtues like courage, patience, and fortitude, not to mention an unqualified acceptance of civilian control of the military. Then with the fighting at last over, in a glorious – and brilliantly engineered – sequence, he bid farewell to his troops, returned his commission to Congress, and rode off to Mount Vernon, arriving at the doorstep of his beloved home on Christmas Eve, 1783. Nothing more was required; the ultimate republican act had been performed. Great power, steadfastly and unselfishly exercised for the good of all, had been voluntarily laid aside when the crisis that had called it into being had passed.

No one who knew him would have claimed that George Washington was not an ambitious man. But he did manage to balance self-interest with self-restraint, and that was what his friends and associates in the patriot cause hoped large numbers of Americans would learn to do. Yet for those who entertained such hopes – including Washington himself – the years immediately following the Revolution were a disappointing time. States feuding with one another and torn from within by competing factions, a national government powerless to act either at home or abroad, and at the root of it all a population of individuals who seemed increasingly bent on pursuing their own private aims, whatever the cost to society might be: that was the diagnosis, and eventually it would result in the drafting of a new federal constitution, thereby setting the scene for Washington's return to power and his last great farewell.

Depending on one's perspective, it has never been hard to see in the Constitution of 1787 a strong, counter-revolutionary thrust. The careful orchestration by a small group – convinced that things were getting out of hand – of the movement leading to the Philadelphia convention; the delegates' decision to meet in private and keep their deliberations secret; the early abandonment of the announced plan to alter the Articles of Confederation in favor of creating an entirely new frame of government: all of them would seem to lend weight to such an interpretation. Then there is the document itself, calling for the establishment of a notably strong central government in a republic lately born of a rebellion against central governmental authority. If this was not counter-revolution, how else would one describe it?

The truth was, of course, that the leaders of the Revolution – many of whom were on hand in Philadelphia in 1787 – had never quar-

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reled with the *principle* of central government, only with the way George III, his ministers, and Parliament were conducting the government. Moreover, among the announced purposes of the new governmental compact was securing the liberties of individual citizens, a pledge which someone like James Madison seemed to take with the utmost seriousness. In *Federalist 10*, while deploring the evils caused by factions, Madison still stated unequivocally that factions could never be eliminated, because to do so would violate basic freedoms that government was bound to protect.

Altogether the picture painted in *Federalist 10* was of a nation of individuals busily – if not frantically – scrambling after material advantage and at the same time doing their utmost to bend the political process to suit their own particular interests. How, if ever, was such a world to be ordered? The key, Madison argued, was to extend vigorous, republican government across the *entire* nation. In a large republic, selfish, individual interests would tend to cancel one another out. But equally important was the fundamental nature of republican government. To Madison republican government meant representative government, and the great virtue of representative government was that it refined and enlarged public views "by passing them through the medium of a chosen body of citizens, whose wisdom . . . patriotism and love of justice" would naturally incline them to look beyond all "temporary or partial considerations."

Clearly the representatives Madison was counting on to help blunt the effects of faction – individuals he also described as those possessing "the most attractive merit and the most diffusive and established characters" – were not to be ordinary Americans. And in fact much of the argument in *Federalist 10* amounted to unabashed elitism, an approach that in the abstract might have seemed poorly contrived to win popular support for the proposed Constitution. Happily, however, the case did not have to rest on abstractions. For by intimating at every possible opportunity that the man most likely to become President under the Constitution was George Washington, Madison and his fellow Federalists could hope to make government by the elite not only unthreatening but also finally quite appealing.

In due course, too, the Constitution was adopted, and after an appropriate interlude of soul-searching Washington took up the burdens of the Presidency. He even reluctantly agreed to serve a second term, acquitting himself throughout with unsurpassed dignity. But as before, during the Revolution, the great moment – in symbolic terms, at least – came at the end, when he voluntarily withdrew from public life to live out his remaining days at Mount Vernon. What better example could there have been of the virtues that Madison had hoped the governing

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elite of the new republic would embody? Without Washington, the drama might still have run its course, but nowhere near as convincingly.

* * *

And how very different indeed all this was from the French experience! While American revolutionary leaders had succeeded both in locating an acceptable political tradition in their own past and in finding a living symbol of the virtues they prized, with the onset of the Terror the French increasingly conceived of their political goals in ahistorical, purely theoretical terms. Far from seeking continuity, they strove to alter completely the country's social and religious fabric, to dismember its political institutions, to wrench it from its history. And that history included the opening stages of the Revolution no less than the *ancien régime*. The Terror accepted only heroes of its own making and soon enough destroyed even those. As early as 1790 Edmund Burke had formulated the essence of the problem: "Is it then true, that the French government was such as to be incapable or undeserving of reform; so that it was of absolute necessity that the whole fabric should be at once pulled down, and the area cleared for the erection of a theoretical, experimental edifice in its place?"

In fact, it was precisely such a *tabula rasa* that the Jacobins craved. The founding of the French Republic in 1792 marked the Year One of a new historical and political era. And in order to assure that all ties to the past were severed, the living symbol of French history, the king, had to be annihilated. Centuries of injustice and despair would be magically erased when the head of the tyrant fell. The first precious months of the revolutionary Convention were therefore spent, not drafting a Constitution, but determining the King's fate. But how exactly was the void left by Louis's departure to be filled?

It was Rousseau who had answered that question. A special kind of goodness – identified simply as *la vertu* – would, as Conor Cruise O'Brien has observed, take the place of the old God of the churches while the nation (the general will) took the place of the king. However, the fatal stumbling block for the Revolution concerned precisely this ambiguous concept of virtue. Robespierre defined *la vertu* in the broadest possible terms. It was man's inner goodness as well as the inherent goodness of the people, the spirit of *fraternité*, the love of the public welfare and of *la patrie*. But it was also opposition to everything corrupt (Robespierre himself was called the Incorruptible), not to mention suspicion of the wealthy and powerful and finally of anyone thought to be less than utterly committed to the Revolution and its works. So the promise of brotherhood withered, and virtue, at first associated with goodness, came to be identified with vengeance.

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The corollary of this marriage of virtue and vengeance was a growing emphasis on revolutionary energy and potency. Hence Saint-Just's denunciation of the "cowardly" inertia of the Girondins, who wished to spare the king: "Some have not yet abandoned monarchy. Others seem to fear that later they will suffer for their courage: they lack all *energy*. The disputes, the perfidies, the malice, and the anger which show themselves in turn are meant to entrap that *soaring vigor* of which we have such need; else they are a mark of the *impotence* of the human spirit." Thus was the *vir* to be put back into *virtus*.

In America George Washington had presented his fellow citizens with an exemplary model of personal restraint. In contrast, the Jacobins offered France a depersonalized, disembodied myth of virtue, the apotheosis of reason gone mad – a salad of moral superiority, patriotism, vengeance, and violence. Danton's comment, "Let us be terrible so that the people will not have to be," captures well the Jacobin sense of duty to the nation conflated with a moral obligation to kill. Virtue had become the justification for persecution and murder. Not even Thomas Paine could translate Washingtonian self-restraint into language that could be understood in France in 1793.

But fortunately the revolutionary cult of virtue – detached from a two-thousand year tradition of Judeo-Christian morality – was short-lived. The republic of virtue held limited appeal for an exhausted nation. Soon enough terror and vengeance were disavowed, and in the early decades of the nineteenth century there was instead an intense desire to overcome the radical discontinuity the Revolution had injected into French history as well as the deep divisions that had split the nation. Political theorists, historians, and poets were agreed on the need to find a unifying moral and political basis for post-Revolutionary society. Both the left and the right were eager to replace theoretical, abstract public myths with ones anchored in France's historical and religious past.

During the Restoration, the pro-royalist right believed that the problem of bringing ethics back into politics had been resolved in their favor. The imprisonment and beheading of the king had aroused a certain amount of genuine sympathy among the French, which to the royalists signified a disavowal of Louis's Jacobin judges and their Revolution. Given the facts of the case, too, it was easy to depict the fate of Louis XVI in Christian terms – even to liken it to Christ's own Passion. Moments before his death, the king had pardoned those who were about to execute him, and using his words of forgiveness, writers like Joseph de Maistre and Chateaubriand created the myth of a compassionate monarchy eager to help the French expiate their collective guilt for the crimes of the Revolution.

The myth of royal martyrdom and forgiveness was highly useful to

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the Bourbon Restoration in its effort to achieve post-Revolutionary national reconciliation. But the subsequent regime, the July Monarchy of Louis Philippe, had as little use for a mystical mythology of sacrifice as it did for the Jacobin Terror. Instead the so-called bourgeois monarchy adopted as its motto Guizot's admonition to "get rich" (shades of the Reagan years) and advertised a liberal ideology of individualism, freedom, and self-interest. France of the 1830s was thus not so very different from American society as James Madison had pictured it in *Federalist 10*. And critics of the July Monarchy's economic liberalism spoke out not only in the name of the disinherited poor and social conscience, but also in the name of social unity – of fraternity.

Yet such critics faced a complex challenge in hoping both to rehabilitate republican ideology and to stem the tide of what they saw as France's moral decline by reconceiving Progresp in spiritual and nationalist, rather than in libertarian, terms. Their goal was to emphasize the collective, the many over the one. And to accomplish that, they sought an exemplary figure who could inspire individuals to become citizens, to forego self-interest in favor of national interest. But in the search for such a figure, the great national myth-maker and historian of the French Revolution, Jules Michelet, discovered to his dismay that none of the heroes of the Revolution would suffice: none could abolish political differences and represent all the French, and none could adequately combine political and moral themes. France had never produced a George Washington.

So in the end Michelet had to look beyond the Revolution, and like so many others in the nineteenth century he turned to Joan of Arc. Joan had all the requisite qualities for a democratic national hero. She came from the people. She was a courageous warrior who loved France and defended her against external enemies. Unlike the imaginary female figure of Marianne, who had symbolized the Republic in painting and sculpture, Joan possessed a real history and personality. And, finally, she belonged to the common past of all the French. Devout, courageous, empathetic, democratic, Anglophobic, she was the ideal figure on which to base a new conception of French nationhood.

But first Michelet had to transform Joan from a monarchist heroine, whose mission had been to lead the dauphin to be crowned at Reims, into a democratic exemplary being. He thus emphasized her devotion to the kingdom, not to the king. His Joan told Baudricourt, the king's servant, that the kingdom did not belong to the dauphin, but rather to *his* Lord, God Almighty, and although God wanted Charles to become king, he was only to be the "lieutenant of the King of Heaven who is the king of France."

Second, Michelet traced French national feeling to Joan's percep-

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tion that there in fact existed a French nation. "Before the Maid, there was hatred for the English; there were sharp hostilities between provinces and there were political passions; but national feeling had not yet been expressed. It was pronounced for the first time during the battle of Orleans by Joan of Arc: 'Never could I see the blood of a Frenchman but my hair would stand on end!' " Michelet writes that when Joan used the simple expression *French blood*, "for the first time, one senses that France is loved like a person." Through Joan's love for the "personhood" of the nation, disparate provinces and isolated individuals were fused into a collective national being.

Essential to this new sense of French nationhood were deeply Christian themes, for Michelet also molded Joan into a complex religious figure, both Mary and Jesus, holy Mother and national Savior. He compared her to a holy Virgin who gave birth to the nation. But far more important was her assimilation with Christ. As Michelet depicted her, she consciously and willingly sacrificed herself for the salvation of others and, in her suffering and terrifying death, relived Christ's Passion. Thus, through their identification with Joan of Arc, the French too could come to share in Christ's Passion, thereby transforming themselves from egotistical, atomized individuals into a community of citizens willing to sacrifice for, and suffer with, each other.

For Michelet, the capacity to make sacrifices was the sign of the full emotional and spiritual development of the individual. It was also the *sine qua non* of citizenship and nationhood. When, in 1846, he wrote *The People*, his dramatic formulation of French nationalism, he was acutely aware of a spiritual crisis in France. The cause, he felt, was a decline of the spirit of self-sacrifice, especially among the wealthy, and searching for a source of spiritual strength he turned to a celebration of the vitality and warmth of the poorer classes in France. For them sacrifice – not interest or profit – was a way of life, passed down from generation to generation.

But while the sacrifices of ordinary citizens furthered the common good and served the cause of "progress," they were not just sublunary acts. They retained a suprarational, religious character because, Michelet reasoned, only for a mystical being or entity greater than the individual could the individual be persuaded to sacrifice himself. And this sacred entity was not God but the Nation. As early as 1831, he had yearned for a faith in which a sacred nation would replace an elusive and perhaps extinct deity: "It is from you that I shall ask for help, my noble country: you must take the place of the God who escapes us, that you may fill within us the immeasurable abyss which extinct Christianity has left there."

The message was clear: shared suffering was the glue that bound the

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people together, and sacrifice was the host in this holy national communion. The people had become a transcendent collective being that gave birth to a new religion of nationalism, the equation for which was simple: Joan = the French; Joan = Christ; the French = Christ.

Thus had Michelet achieved, through the story of Joan of Arc, the transformation of traditional Christianity into a new nationalist religion in which the people, reliving Christ's Passion, became the locus of the sacred. Curiously, he was also reconceiving the mythology of sacral kingship, for the French people not only eclipsed Louis XVI as a Christ-like martyr, they took on other supernatural characteristics of the quasi-divine monarch. They became sacred, unitary, sovereign. However the king had only been God's representative on earth, not himself – as the people now became – a divine object of worship.

And whereas the French Revolution had failed to integrate into its ideology of virtue a sense of either the unique past of the nation or a moral code based on Christian values, Michelet's romantic myth of Joan of Arc neatly filled the vacuum. Here was a figure who symbolized what was essential in revolutionary ideology – the dignity and divinity of the common person – but who also belonged to French history and to the Christian vision of redemption. Through Joan of Arc, Michelet redefined civic virtue: it was no longer revolutionary goodness, energy, vengeance, or even justice, but personal sacrifice, collective suffering, and mystical nationalism. Meanwhile four thousand miles away, a nation torn by civil war would also attempt to heal its wounds and find unity through a vision of redemptive national suffering.

* * *

Tragically, none of the safeguards that Madison had hoped would insure domestic peace in the new American republic proved equal to the tensions released by slavery. Even as the nation grew larger, it split ever more deeply along sectional lines. Nor did representative government appear to offer any cure. For all that politicians like Daniel Webster continued to celebrate "the character of George Washington" as America's finest achievement, most of those who flocked to the seats of power in Washington, D.C. seemed less and less inclined to take a broad, national view of their responsibilities. From time to time legislative compromises were attempted, but finally nothing availed. By the end of 1860 the Union stood on the brink of collapse.

The immediate cause of the crisis was the election of Abraham Lincoln as President of the United States, and within a month of his inauguration armed hostilities broke out in Charleston Harbor. In the years that followed, the precise nature of the conflict thus begun would itself become the subject of heated controversy. Was it a war, or simply an insurrection, as Lincoln initially claimed? At different times for

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different purposes the government in Washington defined it both ways. Similarly, when the fighting began, the announced aim of the North was to preserve the Union, but after the Emancipation Proclamation the emphasis shifted to ending slavery. Meanwhile, through all Lincoln's major pronouncements ran yet another interpretation. "A people's contest," the war for American democracy: if anything, that would remain for him the central meaning of the Civil War – and its ultimate justification.

By embracing democracy as wholeheartedly as he did, Lincoln was setting himself apart from a long line of distinguished political theorists, not the least of whom was James Madison. In *Federalist 10* Madison had paired his defense of republican government with an unequivocal attack on democracy, which he defined as government conducted directly by citizens meeting together in person for that purpose. Unlike republican government, which worked through representation "to refine and enlarge the public views," direct action by the people invariably led to disaster. "Such democracies," declared Madison, "have ever been spectacles of turbulence and contention; have ever been found incompatible with personal security or the rights of property; and have in general been as short in their lives as they have been violent in their deaths."

For Madison, republican and democratic forms existed in sharp opposition to one another. Like the canny lawyer he was, Lincoln hazarded less on the subject, but increasingly a combination of his own convictions and the logic of the situation led him to take positions that were, at bottom, distinctly *un*-Madisonian. Eager in his first Inaugural Address to allay Southern fears, he concentrated on making clear his determination to abide by all the guarantees afforded minorities in the Constitution. But for all the measured forbearance of his assurances, on one point he was emphatic: if the Constitution stood mute on a particular issue – as it did on many of the questions dividing the North and South – then the only way to resolve the issue in the case of a minority/majority division was for the minority to yield. Otherwise the government would cease. "A majority held in restraint by constitutional checks and limitations, and always changing easily with deliberate changes of popular opinions and sentiments, is the only true sovereign of a free people."

Once the war began, Lincoln could be more open about his views, and he quickly moved to challenge head-on the fundamental elitism of Madisonian republican government. In *Federalist 10* Madison had spoken of representatives elected for their "established characters," who would act independently of the popular will. But as Lincoln saw it, the entire secession movement was the product of just such a system. It was "the politicians" – not the people – who had carried the day for disunion.

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And as "subtle and profound on the rights of minorities" as those politicians were, they systematically ignored the wishes of the majority. In almost every state in the South, Lincoln argued, secession was a minority movement, and those who engineered it only proved what little respect they had for popular government when, in the new Confederate constitution, they substituted a phrase like "We, the deputies of the sovereign and independent States" for the familiar "We, the People."

Of course Lincoln himself was a politician, but to his mind there was a crucial difference. Unlike "the seceder politicians" of the South, he felt bound by the wishes of those who had elected him: "The people themselves, and not their servants, can safely reverse their own deliberate decisions," he declared. Furthermore he was convinced that "the plain people" of the nation saw things as he did. Even with large numbers of officers resigning their commissions to join the Confederate cause, the lower ranks – to a man – had stood firm. "Not one common soldier or common sailor is known to have deserted his flag." Such was "the patriotic instinct of the plain people."

And such was Lincoln's crusade for government "of the people, by the people, and for the people." Framed in sharp contrast to a tradition which took as the chief duty of government the protection of minority interests and sought to accomplish that goal through the self-limiting rule of a responsible elite, his vision was uncompromisingly democratic. It was also undeniably revolutionary. For while he spoke of preserving democracy, in reality he was calling for its empowerment, just as he might have – had he wished to – proclaimed the death of James Madison's republic. And the final justification for the new order was no intricately wrought constitutional argument, but rather an abiding faith in the capacities of ordinary citizens. Where Madison had feared the people's passion and seen it as destructive of liberty and harmony, Lincoln found in it the wellsprings of justice and patriotism and counted on it to rescue the nation from the machinations of self-seeking, deceitful politicians.

More than anything else, too, it was his vision of the people and their stake in the conflict that would sustain Lincoln through the horrors of four long years of civil war. As the casualties on both sides multiplied, as the cost in dollars and physical devastation rose steadily higher, it was difficult in any terms to find meaning in the scene Lincoln surveyed. In time he came to see an inscrutable higher will as the architect of events. "The Almighty has His own purposes," he would declare in his second Inaugural Address. Still, the basic vision endured – endured and gathered strength from the very sacrifices it inspired. At Gettysburg, with memorable eloquence, Lincoln eulogized those who had given "the last full measure of devotion" in battle. Not only had their struggle "hallowed"

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the ground on which they fought, it had imposed on the living the need for fresh dedication of their own to ensure "that these dead shall not have died in vain" – that freedom and democracy would not "perish from the earth."

Extraordinary sacrifices made by ordinary people; the power of such sacrifices and the suffering they entailed both to "consecrate" and to bind other people in the struggle for higher, moral ends; the promise of spiritual community and finally immortality for those who followed the true way: these were traditional Christian themes. And in voicing them Lincoln was expressing many of the same sentiments that Michelet had projected onto Joan of Arc – in the service, too, of the same sort of mystical nationalism that Michelet had hoped to awaken in his own countrymen. All Lincoln lacked was a concrete exemplary figure to place at the center of his creation, and in the end fate would solve that problem for him. Mortally wounded at Ford's Theater on Good Friday, 1865, he himself became the exemplary center – as Massachusetts Senator Charles Sumner put it, "a sacrifice" in "the great cause." Yet even before then, as the likelihood of a Northern victory grew, Lincoln had prefigured that denouement with his policy of leniency toward the soon-to-be-defeated South. "With malice toward none," he longed to lay aside the question of war-guilt and bind up the nation's wounds with care and compassion for all.

Sacrifice, suffering, forgiveness, martyrdom: the circle stood complete. In the blood of its sixteenth President, a shattered, war-weary nation could see itself reborn in liberty, equality, democracy, and union. Such was the promise of Lincoln's vision, sealed at last in the popular imagination by his own tragic death.

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In America just as in France, then, the Enlightenment legacy of rationality proved to be an insufficient basis for modern nationhood; if in France it led by a short, violent route to the Terror, in this country it produced a divisive and finally unworkable elitism. In the long run in both countries emotional, visceral bonds turned out to have far greater appeal – and political efficacy – than *la vertu*. As exemplary figures, Joan of Arc and Abraham Lincoln offered a conception of national identity that equated sovereignty not just with "the people" but with *a* people, fraternally bound together, sacrificing individual self-interest for a cause greater than themselves. And even today we associate our highest political and humanitarian values with contemporary national "martyrs" like John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King.

Still, nagging doubts linger, warning insistently that for all the appeal of romantic, fraternal nationalism, there is a darker side to it as well. Surely the French were fortunate that nationalism never devolved into

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the particular blend of racism, imperialism, and militarism found elsewhere in Europe in this century, just as Americans were fortunate that Lincoln's brand of collectivism aspired to nothing more nationalistic than a joint struggle to forge a just and free society. For in truth nationhood based on the sanctity of the people with its implied faith in collective emotion remains a disturbing if not an ominous concept.

When emotion is a society's basis, it will also be the final arbiter of conflicts. Addressing this problem, Karl Popper explained that, if a dispute arises in a society which accepts the primacy of emotional values, once the appeal to constructive emotions has been made and has failed, the community can appeal only to other, less constructive emotions – fear, hatred, envy, and ultimately, violence. Popper concluded that no emotion, not even love, can replace the rule of institutions controlled by reason.

While he was writing *The Open Society* from 1938 to 1943, Popper saw with the rest of the world the apocalyptic consequences of a war waged by a nation whose citizens had sacrificed themselves for the collectivity, lost their identity in the group, abdicated their critical faculties, and submitted to the will of a demonic madman. But again, in post-Revolutionary America and France – no less than in modern Germany – citizenship has not been just a rational affair, a delicate Madisonian balance of egotism and altruism; far more heavily than *liberté* and *égalité* it has stressed that strange and indefinable third member of the trinity: intangible, mystical *fraternité*. And this even though fraternity – the emotional bond among citizens, the basis of so many forms of humanitarian ideology – may be at bottom at odds with freedom.

Well might we ask whether the legacy of reason and individualism inherited from the Enlightenment was finally not enough for nationhood – or whether it was too much. Is rationality lacking some essential element, or is it simply too great a burden? Did two Revolutions set free our critical faculties and endow us with responsibility for our own fate, only to have us cry out later for relief and yearn to submerge ourselves in the group, in the belief that love for one another offers a higher form of experience and insight than rational thought? So it would seem. Can we live by reason alone? Whatever the final answer – or the dangers – may be, the fact is that we have not and do not. Nor can any amount of commemorative rhetoric transform us into direct heirs of the Enlightenment. At most we are distant descendants, the residuary legatees of a complex and difficult inheritance shaped as much by 19th-century romanticism as by 18th-century reason and revolution.

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FANG LIZHI

Form and Physics

Beauty is not the exclusive domain of literature, art, and religion. It also belongs to physics. In fact, the first established group of esthetes among the ancient Greek philosophers was the Pythagorean School, made up of mathematicians, astronomers, and physicists. "Beauty" is still a common word in the vocabulary of physics. When a paper is read at a conference or a published scientific result is evaluated, one often hears phrases such as "a *beautiful* theory," or "a model which is much more *elegant* than the previous one." Although this esthetic sense within the realm of science is hard to pin down or formalize, it is nevertheless something felt by almost everyone who has undertaken the study of physics.

The Austrian physicist Ludwig Boltzmann (1844-1906) had the following reaction to the work of James Clerk Maxwell(1831-79), the first professor of experimental physics at Cambridge University:

> A musician, upon hearing the first few measures of a piece of music, can distinguish whether the piece is by Mozart, Beethoven, or Schubert. In the same way, a mathematician, upon reading the first few pages of a proof, can tell whether it is the work of Cauchy, Gauss, Jacobi, or Helmholtz. A high degree of external elegance, with sometimes the feeblest underlying skeletons of conclusions, characterizes the French, whereas the English, especially Maxwell, are characterized by a great dramatic force. Who does not know Maxwell's dynamical theory of gases? First, the variations of the velocities majestically develop. Then from one side the equations of state make their entrance, from the other side enter the equations for central motion, and the chaos of formulas surges higher and higher. Suddenly the four words resound: "Put n=5." The malevolent demon V [*velocity*] vanishes, just as if in a piece of music a wild, continually disruptive figure in the basses had become silent. As if by a stroke of magic, all that previously seemed uncontrollable is put in order. There is no time to say why this or that substitution is made; let anyone who does not *feel* it lay the book down. Maxwell is no producer of program music; he does not need to provide explanatory notes. The formulas freely spew forth result after result, until, in a final surprising effect, the thermal equilibrium of a heavy gas is ob-

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tained, and the curtain falls.

Bertrand Russell described mathematics this way:

> Mathematics, rightly viewed, possesses not only truth but a supreme beauty – a beauty cold and austere, like that of sculpture, without appeal to any part of our weaker nature, without the gorgeous trappings of painting or music, yet sublimely pure, and capable of a stern perfection such as only the greatest art can show. The true spirit of delight, the exaltation, the sense of being more than man, which is the touchstone of the highest excellence, is to be found in mathematics as surely as in poetry.

There are two sharply contrasting aspects to the study of those natural sciences which include astronomy and physics. On the one hand, science is the basis for all technological advancement, and thus has enormous practical value to society, in that technological progress greatly facilitates the production of goods and products. On the other hand, the *motivation* for scientific research is completely divorced from the goal of technological advancement itself. The latter is invariably concerned with practical applications, whereas the former resembles more an artistic endeavor – it arises from the search for and the creation of beauty.

Copernicus states clearly at the outset of his landmark work, *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium* (*On the Revolution of the Heavenly Spheres*):

> Among the many various and literary artistic pursuits which invigorate men's minds, the strongest affection and utmost zeal should, I think, promote the studies concerned with the most beautiful objects, most deserving to be known.

The French mathematician and physicist Henri Poincaré is much revered in the scientific world, despite the fact that Lenin once pronounced him "a great scientist but a negligible philosopher." Poincaré's comment concerning motivation in scientific research has become one of the classic statements on the subject:

> The scientist does not study nature because it is useful: he studies it because he delights in it, and he delights in it because it is beautiful. If nature were not beautiful, it would not be worth knowing, and if nature were not worth knowing, life would not be worth living . . . Intellectual beauty is sufficient unto itself, and it is for its sake, more perhaps than for the future good of humanity, that the scientist de-

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votes himself to long and difficult labors.

Of course, the value of science lies in its accordance with truth, that is, in its ability to explain already known phenomena and to predict future events. Science must always be able to stand up to observations and empirical tests. This standard is obviously not to be equated with a search for beauty *per se*, so what does it mean to say that "the search for beauty" can, at least in part, be substituted for "the search for truth"? Some famous examples in the history of science address this question. They all seem to make clear one point: the universe, or nature, has the property that all truths are necessarily beautiful. Perhaps this statement cannot be considered a well-defined scientific truth, but it can at least be stated as an effective and workable heuristic: "The pursuit of beauty will inevitably lead to the discovery of truth." Throughout history, this heuristic has achieved a series of successes, sometimes spectacular ones.

One example of how cultural concepts of beauty can exert a shaping influence on scientific progress is found in the history of the theory of a round earth. Statements about a spherical earth are first evident to us in the writings of the ancient Greeks and encountered often in various classical texts. This concept of the earth was later embraced by Western astronomy. By contrast, the concept of a round earth was never clearly formulated in ancient China, though some commentary found in specific ancient writings could perhaps be interpreted as implying such a theory. Three-dimensional models such as those found in Beijing's Temple of Heaven, depicting the heavens as a sphere and the earth as a flat square, are representative of the unvarying Chinese orthodox view.

The reason for this difference in Chinese and Western astronomy may be attributed to different cultural concepts of beauty, rather than differences in phenomena observed. Two thousand years ago, neither the Chinese nor the Greeks had anything that could be considered direct empirical evidence on which to base a round-earth conjecture. (Only later, when Columbus discovered America and Magellan circled the globe, was there indisputable proof of the notion.) Each had only a small number of astronomical observations on which to base their hypotheses about the shape of the earth. And when confronted with the same observed phenomenon, the Greeks and Chinese arrived at very different conclusions. They both observed that the sun is lower in the sky at noon in the north than it is in the south. To the Greeks, the model of a round earth was satisfying and plausible, because they had already completely absorbed Pythagorean notions concerning the harmony of the universe and because it seemed evident to them that circles and spheres were the most perfect shapes in nature. They went even further and used the difference in the sun's height in the north and south to estimate the

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earth's radius, yielding results very close to modern measurements.

In contrast, Chinese astronomers, while realizing that this discrepancy in the sun's angle indicated that the earth was not perfectly flat, came up with a compromise model. They hypothesized that the cities in which they dwelled indeed rested on a somewhat curved surface but that the earth as a whole was still flat. According to the Chinese model, the land was a slice of a hemisphere floating in a flat ocean. Therefore, even though Chinese measurements of the difference between the angles of the sun in the northern and southern sky were no less accurate than those of the Greeks, the Chinese never used these measurements to calculate the radius of the earth, since they never actually envisioned the earth as being spherical.

It is clear that creativity in scientific thinking depends much upon one's image of the world, and one's image of the world is influenced by one's cultural background. It is precisely in this way that cultural concepts of beauty can exert a shaping influence on scientific progress. The Austrian physicist Ernst Mach wrote:

> In studying nature, we cannot help but apply our knowledge of the interrelationships between the various phenomena under investigation. What we imagine to be the underlying causes for the observed phenomena is limited by our understanding of the world. . . . The fact that observed phenomena often appear random or arbitrary to us makes our perception particularly susceptible to the vagaries of our cultural background.

The theory of the round earth is the first famous triumph of the culturally-influenced world view that perceives the universe as fundamentally beautiful and harmonious. Another famous example is the heliocentric view of the universe. A long-standing popular view of epistemology is that the course of human knowledge rather consistently follows the sequence, "experience –> understanding –> further experience –> greater understanding." Throughout the literature subscribing to this epistemological model, the development of the theory of the heliocentric solar system has always been attributed to the fact that the earlier earth-centered model ran into difficulty in explaining and predicting the observed movements of celestial bodies, and that thus the heliocentric view was developed. Such an account, however, is simply not historically accurate.

What compelled Copernicus to develop the heliocentric model actually had nothing to do with any supposed superiority of the sun-centered model in explaining the movements of the celestial bodies. In fact, all of the observations explained and predicted by the heliocentric model

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could be ascribed to the earth-centered model as well. And wherever there were snags with the earth-centered model, there were similar problems with the sun-centered model. In addition, the predictions yielded by Copernicus's heliocentric theory were *not* as accurate as those of Ptolemy's earth-centered theory. Nowhere in the process that led Copernicus to his theory is there much evidence for the "further experience –> greater understanding" epistemological model. To be sure, if one applies celestial mechanics to the problem, then the heliocentric model emerges as vastly superior to the earth-centered model. Yet celestial mechanics was developed only in the hundred years after Copernicus's death, and it played no role in the formulation of his theory. What did compel Copernicus to envision a heliocentric system was, quite simply, its beauty. What was most attractive about Copernicus's new model, and what made it superior to the earth-centered model, was its simplicity, its consistency, and its harmony. Within the earth-centered theory of Ptolemy, the movements of the celestial bodies could be explained only with recourse to a complicated system of cycles and epicycles. In heliocentric theory, the notion of epicycles was completely discarded, and the orbit of each of the moons and planets was seen as a perfect circle. In *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium* Copernicus states that what drove him to formulate his theory was not so much a need to achieve greater accuracy in his calculations but rather a desire to develop a model of the universe that would be "perfect in form" and possess a "marvelous symmetry."

Johannes Kepler, the German astronomer who considered himself a Pythagorean, observed in his work *Harmonices Mundi*:

> The movement of the heavenly bodies is like a great song, a continuous, many-voiced song. It is a song that must be appreciated through intellect and reason, rather than experienced directly through the sense of hearing. This music, through its modulation and cadence, and according to the working-out of a fixed, preordained six-voice counterpoint, seems to measure and delineate the passage of time.

It must be stressed that Kepler's description of the motion of the planets as a kind of song is not merely a fanciful literary metaphor but an intrinsic part of his research methodology. In many of his works on astronomy Kepler actually employs musical staff notation, using the language of music rather than words to explain his ideas. He often described the velocities and orbital movements of the individual planets in terms of musical intervals and meters, and many of the names given to his various laws of motion come from the musical diagrams he used. In the context of Kepler's research, beauty is not merely a thread running

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parallel through both music and astronomy. It is a bridge connecting the two disciplines.

Twentieth-century physics also makes use of this "esthetic bridge." In the late 1920s, shortly after the birth of quantum mechanics, a young English physicist, P. A. M. Dirac, formulated an equation describing the movement of the electron. One of the most important conclusions of his elegant equation was that there must be a perfect symmetry between positive and negative charges in nature. This meant that since there was an electron which carried a negative charge, then there must perforce exist a corresponding positively-charged particle and, furthermore, that the masses of the two particles must be identical. However, although there was already ample evidence at the time of Dirac's result that the amount of positive and negative charge in nature was the same, the various positively- and negatively-charged particles did not seem to meet the symmetry requirements of the Dirac equation. There was enormous difference between the mass of the negatively-charged electron and that of the positively-charged proton. For this reason, some physicists at first did not accept the Dirac equation, but Dirac himself and many others felt that it was simply too beautiful to discard. Several years later a new particle, the positron, was discovered, and the characteristics of this particle accorded perfectly with the predictions of the Dirac equation – in another vindication of the faith in the beauty of nature's laws. The events surrounding the prediction and subsequent discovery of the positron prompted Dirac to recollect:

> I think there is a moral to this story, namely that it is more important to have beauty in one's equations than to have them fit experiment. . . . It seems that if one is working from the point of view of getting beauty in one's equations, and if one really has a sound insight, one is on a sure line of progress. If there is not complete agreement between the results of one's work and experiment, one should not allow oneself to be too discouraged, because the discrepancy may well be due to minor features that are not properly taken into account, and that will get cleared up with further developments of the theory.

That is to say, accordance with experimental observation is not the only standard for the value of a scientific result. It is for this reason that physics journals do not balk at printing results that are at odds with prevailing experimental evidence.

In 1954, C. N. Yang and his partner Robert Mills wrote a paper on gauge symmetry that contained results completely at odds with experimental evidence. According to their theory, there had to exist a particle with a rest mass of zero, but all experimental evidence had

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excluded such a possibility. Despite this, the theory was published and welcomed by the physics community. The symmetry of the Yang-Mills theory, known as "gauge field theory," was simply too attractive to ignore. Gauge field theory became a lively field in the 1960s, and throughout the last twenty years, during the development of the search for the fundamental laws of mechanics, no facet of physics has been untouched by the theory of gauge symmetries. The modern age of the study of high-energy physics has even been classified as the era of the gauge field theory. Here again, the "beauty" criterion has sidestepped the narrow standard of "experimentalism," the notion that the experiment is all-important. Professor Yang has lectured about another result that falls out of the gauge field theory, namely the existence of "magnetic monopoles." The existence of magnetic monopoles is still in doubt, however, because no researcher has yet been able to observe them in nature. Yang's response to these doubts has been to maintain that the prediction is so satisfyingly beautiful that it is impossible to imagine that nature would not have magnetic monopoles.

One of the tasks of modern physics is to come up with a TOE, a "Theory of Everything," that is, a unified theory of the laws of mechanics. The physics world is quite confident that such a unified theory can eventually be developed, since the history of physics is an unbroken series of successes in finding greater and greater unified theories. Yet in formulating a TOE, laboratory experiments cannot be directly carried out. Esthetic considerations have of necessity replaced empirical standards and principles in judging the value of TOE research. Currently, the most optimistic of those in search of a TOE is the group involved with "superstring theory," a domain that has attracted the most talented particle physicists and astrophysicists of the new generation. The fundamental faith of these physicists is that a theory in accord with the following conditions might possibly be unique and that, based upon these conditions, one could ascertain the origins of the universe. These conditions are: 1.) the greatest harmony: the theory must be one in which the universe exhibits the highest and most ideal symmetry; 2.) the greatest completeness: it must give a complete account of all the mutually interacting forces in the universe; 3.) the greatest possible consistency: it must be a theory in which the universe exhibits a high degree of internal unity and regularity, with all the parts acting in accord with one another.

It can almost be said that superstring theory adheres to, in the most classsic sense, the esthetic principle of Pythagorus:

Harmony + Completeness + Consistency = Truth

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I do not wish to give the impression that beauty in physics is to be equated only with symmetry. Quite the contrary, physics often investigates phenomena that are highly chaotic and random, as well as ones that exhibit a high degree of symmetry. If it can be said that the ancient physicist preferred explanations that drew upon the principles of regularity, proportion, and balance, then modern physicists seem equally drawn to disorder, chaos, and disequilibrium. Einstein's 1905 paper on special relativity revealed profound symmetries involving time and space, the relative and the absolute. Yet in the same year he published a paper on Brownian motion, presenting an extremely refined theory about one of the most random processes in nature. In the nineteenth century the mathematician Charles Hermite observed, "Things that are not elegant have no place in rigorous science; they are merely rubbish." By contrast, the modern physicist John A. Wheeler commented, "It is possible to believe that no one will be considered scientifically literate tomorrow who is not . . . familiar with fractals," fractals here associated with extreme inelegance. Is there any beauty to be found in disorder, chaos, and disequilibrium? In the words of Hermann Weyl, "Asymmetry is almost never due to a complete absence of symmetry." Interestingly, in the arts it is often noted that perfect symmetry is usually not the most desirable or beautiful state of affairs. Rather, what is most satisfactory is some *combination* of symmetry and disorder. And perhaps it can even be said that modern physics has already begun to discover evidence for this esthetic "formula."

As one might expect, modern physics is now devoting itself to understanding the relationship between symmetry and asymmetry, regularity and disorder, equilibrium and disequilibrium, order and chaos. What has been discovered so far is that symmetry can spontaneously give rise to asymmetry, that there is an essential order underlying chaos, that equilibrium depends upon disequilibrium, and that organization can arise out of randomness. In modern art and music, harmony often comes from dissonance, disjointed rhythms arise out of strict meter, and chaotic fragments come together to create a sense of unity. All this seems to indicate that these works are in some sense created in accordance with the esthetic principles in physics. About the relationship of physics to art, David Bohm has said, "Physics is a form of intuition, just like a form of art." And the form this intuition takes involves creativity, structuring, and a free play of the imagination. The English physicist John Tyndall said, "Accurate experiments and observations constitute the foundations of the edifice of science, but imagination itself plays the role of the architect." Einstein voiced this in even clearer terms:

If, then, it is true that this axiomatic basis of theoretical physics can-

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> not be extracted from experience but must be freely invented, can we ever hope to find the right way? . . . I am convinced that we can discover by means of purely mathematical constructions the concepts and the laws connecting them with each other, which furnish the key to the understanding of natural phenomena. Experience may suggest the appropriate mathematical concepts, but they most certainly cannot be deduced from it. Experience remains, of course, the sole criterion of the physical utility of a mathematical construction. But the creative principle resides in mathematics. In a certain sense, therefore, I hold it true that pure thought can grasp reality, as the ancients dreamed.

All in all, physics embodies two opposites of a spectrum, and the development of physics has drawn upon the contributions of both of these polar opposites, exemplified by such complementary pairs as: experimentation versus imagination; logic versus intuition; and objective facts versus subjective esthetic judgment. There are many examples in the history of physics that serve to point out the interdependence and contingent nature of these sets of opposites. It even can be said that the close interrelatedness and interdependence of objective facts and subjective esthetic judgment is *itself* one of the great beauties of physics. Einstein realized this very early when he observed, "The most incomprehensible thing about the universe is the fact that it is comprehensible." From Einstein's statement we can perhaps derive two logical deductions: We are capable only of understanding a universe in which beings capable of understanding it could evolve, and the only kind of universe that is understandable is one that is able to evolve beings capable of understanding it. Perhaps these two mutually dependent inferences constitute evidence for the compatibility of objective fact and esthetic judgment.

TRANSLATED FROM THE CHINESE BY DAVID MOSER

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MÁRIA M. KOVÁCS

Hungary

Back in the 1970s two prominent Hungarian intellectuals, George Konrád and Iván Szelényi wrote a book entitled, *The Road of the Intelligentsia to Class Power*. A few days after they finished the manuscript, they were arrested by the police and expelled from the country without legal proceedings.

One and a half decades later, the Communist *nomenklatura* that arrested Konrád and Szelényi has altogether disappeared from the public eye. Hungary's current president, Arpad Göncz, is a fiction writer, and the prime minister is an historian of medicine who spent most of his life working in a museum. The foreign minister, the minister of defense, and the speaker of the house are all professors of history. It is no exaggeration to say that today's Hungary is led by a government of historians.

Most leaders of the largest opposition party are also academics, though mainly not of history but of economics, philosophy, and sociology. In any event, it is safe to say that the majority of those in the political class are intellectuals in the classical sense – they are precisely the kind of people whose rise to "class power" Konrád and Szélenyi had predicted at the cost of their own imprisonment and expulsion back in the 1970s.

But at least one of the two authors – George Konrád – is not self-congratulatory about his past predictive powers. On the contrary, he has come to rethink his theory. He now considers the rise of the intellectuals no more than a transient episode in the long process of transition from communism to a new political structure:

> Although in the new democracies the most conspicuous actors on the political stage are writers, professors . . . and historians, I do not

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> believe that intellectuals will permanently occupy the place of managers, revolutionaries, secret servicemen, bureaucrats, or priests. True, intellectuals are the kind of people who are able to learn quickly how to perform in all these occupations. But the professors of understanding are only masquerading in these temporary roles. All in all, I do not believe that intellectuals will permanently remain in a position to aspire to a decisive role either in politics or in the economy.

I could not agree more. Current events suggest that the further the Hungarian transition proceeds, the more likely it is to trigger a massive flight of intellectuals away from the political arena. This process has already led some prominent intellectuals in Eastern Europe to conclude that the "class of intellectuals" has fatally failed in its new political role. At a June conference at the Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington, Alexander Smolar, advisor to the first post-transition Polish Prime Minister, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, described Mazowiecki's defeat in the presidential elections as "the fall of the Polish intelligentsia." The intelligentsia, he argued, could and should have performed much more successfully if only it had been able to recognize the political realities of post-transition Poland more clearly. Had Polish intellectuals devised a more accurate diagnosis and a more elaborate response to Poland's realities, they could have preserved their leading positions in the political structure. In the absence of such a response, however, the sympathies of the public inevitably turned towards appeals of a populist-authoritarian nature, represented by the political circle of Lech Walesa.

Contrasting this analysis to events in Hungary, I would put forward a different thesis. Rather than ascribing the "fall" of the intellectuals to mistakes in strategy, in formulating diagnoses and responses, it is possible to see the massive withdrawal of intellectuals from politics, whether voluntary or not, as part of a larger, regional process. Why? The case of Hungary may provide some interesting clues.

In most accounts of the changes in Eastern Europe, Hungary is singled out for its uniquely balanced party structure: a strong government coalition of right-of-center parties on the one hand (Hungarian Democratic Forum, Christian Democrats and Smallholders), and a strong liberal opposition (Free Democrats and Young Democrats) on the other. In the happy absence of a significant residual Communist party, it is said, the political outcome will be dependent upon the relative strengths of the conservatives and the liberals. Thus it seems that a peaceful and orderly transfer of power from conservatives to liberals or vice versa is now at least theoretically possible. In purely technical terms, this might be a correct description. In reality, the problem with this ideally balanced party structure is that its constituent parts were put together behind

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closed doors, in almost secrecy during the short months preceding the roundtable negotiations in the spring of 1989. Even the desperate infighting between the outgoing communists and the incoming opposition took place in the total absence of mass publicity, not to speak of mass mobilization. This was the trade-off – arguably an acceptable one – that Hungary made for its uniquely peaceful, orderly, and smooth transition.

This lack of mass mobilization has led to a paradoxical situation. It was precisely the absence of mass politics, of a large social movement, of unrest that gave various groups inside the intellectual opposition the freedom to literally dream up a diversified party structure, one that could in the future comfortably accommodate many shades of political opinion. It gave them the freedom to mastermind an exemplary, pluralistic framework. However, the same absence of mass participation allowed Hungarian intellectuals to construct a multi-party system that reflected predominant divisions not within society at large but within the intelligentsia itself. As a result, Hungary's new pluralistic party system is largely an outcome of the pluralism among the intellectuals and reflects the special concerns of intellectuals. For example, there are anticommunist cosmopolitan intellectuals in one party, anticommunist populist intellectuals in another; anticommunist intellectuals with histories of active dissent in one party, anticommunist intellectuals with passive resistance records in another; Jewish intellectuals in one party, non-Jewish intellectuals in another. And bordering on the comical, there are historians in one party and philosophers in another.

The party structure created by this peculiar class of intellectuals has already been put to the test. The balance sheet for its first year is, at best, uneven. To its credit, the ruling conservative-populist coalition is definitely moving in a pragmatic direction in its economic policies. On the other hand, it is desperately trying to preserve and inflate the political value of the most divisive intellectual issues to which it owes its very existence. This coalition is also working to increase the symbolic, ideological distance between itself and the liberal opposition. The ritual invocation of controversial prewar symbolism attached to the intellectual traditions of the political right, the partisan identification of such symbolism as the only legitimate framework of Hungarian national identity and culture, are just two of those emotionally overcharged issues. Such divisions have already, in one year alone, made communication and compromise between the two major groups, the Forum and the Free Democrats, virtually impossible. This stalemate between the major parties does not bode well for the prospect of a flexible realignment of coalitions in Hungary's emerging five- or six-party system.

The ambiguity of the public toward this peculiar political class of intellectuals is revealed by some puzzling features that have emerged from

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recent opinion polls. Foremost among the riddles is the *seeming* absence of any coherence between the public's sympathy toward the major political figures and the major parties. The latest opinion polls surveying the popularity ratings of the twenty most prominent Hungarian politicians and of the six parties in Parliament came up with the following results. President Arpad Göncz rates with a high seventy-two percent approval. However, from there on the results reveal striking inconsistencies. The current prime minister has only a forty-six percent approval rating and ranks fifteenth down on the list. Second on the list with close to a seventy-two percent approval rating is an opposition party Free Democrat, yet his party gets only an eighteen percent approval rating. The third on the list with seventy-one percent approval is Miklós Németh, the last Communist prime minister of 1989 (since reincarnated as an international banker) whose party gets only seven percent approval. Fifth on the list of twenty with sixty-eight percent approval is Gyula Horn, the current chairman of the successor Communist Party – again the party receives a low rating of seven percent. The riddle goes on: individual and party approval ratings reveal no apparent connection.

Yet, one pattern does appear. With the sole exception of President Göncz, there is not one politician with a high approval rating who could be considered an intellectual. Whereas the Free Democrat Gábor Demszky, second from the top on the public favorites list, has no background of any extended, professional intellectual occupation, the leader of that party, the philosopher János Kis, is ranked down at twelfth from the top with fifty-two percent approval. In the precious first third of the list, none of the seven favorites could be termed intellectuals.

But that is not the last of our series of riddles. Observing the results of the opinion polls, if elections were held today, the party that would come in first would be the liberal Young Democrats. Their present rating of thirty-five percent is the highest any party achieved in the polls. And reflecting that success, the party's leaders occupy three out of the first seven places on the list of twenty. With them, unlike with the others, there is a pattern. They enjoy the support of over a third of the country, and their leaders individually take almost half of the leading positions on the list of twenty.

What accounts for this singular prominence? And what accounts for the singular coherence, in this case, of individual and party ratings? Certainly not the Young Democrats' lack of an intellectual agenda nor the absence of a political philosophy. The Young Democrats are brilliant politicians, most of them young lawyers. They are straightforward free-marketers with straightforward libertarian principles. They are also intransigent in their style: they make no concessions to nationalism or to the contraining of personal freedoms. What makes the Young Democrats

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unique is that not a single member of the party was ever involved in the pre-transition infighting of Hungarian intellectuals. In fact, in the classical sense of the word, there is not one intellectual in the party. In 1989, the Young Democrats grew out of a semilegal youth group of law graduates who had to be no older than thirty, and later thirty-five, years of age in order to belong. With this single move, they simply closed their ranks to the bitter and at time tribal divisions within the classical intelligentsia.

Politics for the Young Democrats also means something very different from what it means to Hungarian intellectuals. It is a pragmatic, everyday affair with very little or no millennial overtones. Unlike most intellectuals of the old school, the Young Democrats are not indignant at the banality of political processes, or about the *alltag* character of democratic politics. What they are interested in is preserving the country in one piece until the time when politics may indeed become a routine affair, handled by professional managers, professional secret agents, and professional bureaucrats. They anticipate a future when historians, writers, and philosophers may, or even will be forced to, abandon their masks, and return to their own, divisive, unambivalent and at times even creative intellectual routine.

VLADIMIR TISMANEANU

Romania

Almost four years ago, I participated in a conference in New York City, "Will the Communist States Survive? The View from Within." That was in October 1987, and Gorbachev's reforms had generated a widespread state of euphoria. The rise of a revisionist leader in the *sanctum sanctorum* of the empire seemed to justify high expectations of rapid change. It was obvious that the margin of permissiveness or, better said, the limits of the Kremlin's tolerance of experimentation with reform had dramatically changed. What had been absolute heresy under Brezhnev was enshrined as the new party line under Gorbachev. For instance, the slogan "Socialism with a Human Face" was embraced by the Soviet General Secretary and designated as one of the major goals of *perestroika*, yet among us at the conference there were also some skeptics.

I remember how the well-known Soviet dissident writer and logician Alexander Zinoviev ironically titled his contribution "Crocodiles Cannot Fly." Miklos Haraszti, the Hungarian maverick intellectual and

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human rights activist, sent a paper titled "The Paradigm of the Boots," referring to Stalin's monument in Budapest and maintaining that the totalitarian boots had been internalized to such an extent that any hope of liberation was a simple illusion. Ivan Svitak, the Czech philosopher, argued that Gorbachev's reforms were nothing but dust in the eyes, another propaganda exercise bound to save, not to abolish, the system. The Romanian dissident Mihai Botez spoke of the rise of the national-communist state as the most likely development one could foresee even under Gorbachev. At that moment, Kadarism, described by Georg Lukacs's students Agnes Heller and Ferenc Feher as an enlightened version of Khrushchevism, appeared to be the best one could expect for Eastern Europe. Others, including myself, thought that the new elbow room created by the revisionist tsar in the Kremlin had brought down the barriers that for decades had prevented the triumph of Eastern Europe's "long rebellion against Yalta" (to use the telling formula proposed by Heller and Feher). This approach focused on the rise of civil society in most of these countries, including such fortresses of Stalinism as East Germany and Bulgaria.

The great rebellion of 1989 shattered many deeply-imbedded beliefs and forced us to question much of the conventional wisdom with regard to these regimes. When we consider the causes of the 1989 convulsions we have to refer to the following factors: first, the upheaval was linked to the complete loss of legitimacy of the ruling elites in the region. It is true that this phenomenon had started in the mid-1950s, but it reached its zenith during the period of profound pessimism and even despair at Brezhnevism, when socialism in its Soviet version appeared as an irredeemable historical *cul de sac.* The communist parties had lost all self-confidence and suffered an irresistible political decay. All attempts to instill new life into the old dogmas, all endeavors to engage in what the Catholics did with the strategy of *aggiornamento*, did not work in East and Central Europe. There was no reservoir of faith for those who believed in the salvation of the existing structures. In other words, the Marxist myth had exhausted its galvanizing power, and there were no social groups interested in perpetuating the matrix of domination as it had functioned for decades.

As the communist elites demonstrated their absolute ineptitude, new social forces were coming to the fore, proposing alternative solutions. In a broad sense, these were the segments of the emerging civil societies, that is, collective efforts to create parallel institutions and activities, challenging the government's pretense to control all of human life. The decline of the Marxist myth and the rise of civil society were linked to the overall political, social, economic, and moral crises experienced by these countries. The most palpable catalyst of the

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imminent collapse was the economic bankrupcy of state socialism and the awareness that only a free market could guarantee economic recovery. The command economies had failed to provide the goods that would have justified the sacrifices ceaselessly imposed on the population.

The external factors cannot be underestimated: without the major changes in the Kremlin and the redefinition by the Gorbachev-Yakovlev-Shevardnadze team of the Soviet international strategy, including the new doctrine of the de-ideologization of international relations, the changes in East and Central Europe would have been much slower and certainly more disruptive and violent. The threat of a foreign intervention had ceased to function as a deterrent, especially after the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. It appeared clear to civic activists in East and Central Europe that the Soviet Union would not be interested in any adventure that would jeopardize its new image and the relations established by Gorbachev with the West. The opposition of the "Gang of Four" (Nicolae Ceausescu, Milos Jakes, Erich Honecker, and Todor Zhivkov) to Soviet-inspired reforms was actually counterproductive from the viewpoint of local communist elites, who completely lost any chance to play a significant role in a post-totalitarian transition period.

The nature of the upheaval requires a special analysis because it also explains the difficulties encountered by these countries during their transition periods. First, one must note that the 1989 revolutions challenged a false principle of authority, based upon universally execrated lies and pseudolegitimacy. The changes were revolutionary because they replaced one form of political power through another one: all these regimes were mythocratic dictatorships whose only reason to stay in power was the ideologically-defined predestined role of the working class and its avant-garde party. Once this ideological fallacy was debunked as a mere rationalization for the usurpation of power by an incompetent and corrupt bureaucracy, there was no foundation for its survival (with the exception of fear, apathy, and inertia). The upheaval was a synthesis of two trends: on the one hand the anticommunist surge and on the other the search for alternative institutional and axiological solutions. What has happened in East and Central Europe since 1989 has been therefore the simultaneous self-destruction of the communist political culture (with its traditions, habits, attitudes, mentalities, values, behavioral patterns) and, on the "positive" side, the reconstitution of civil societies (atomized and almost destroyed by communism) and the structuring of genuinely political forms.

Communist regimes had appropriated the rhetoric of the left, although in reality they were authoritarian dictatorships based on the manipulation of both nationalism and internationalism. Hungary's Kadar was somewhat different, with his old-fashioned indifference to national

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symbols that played into the hands of the mounting opposition. With the exception of Albania, Romania, and Yugoslavia, they were all ready to toe the Soviet international line. It was therefore logical that their repudiation had to be *antitotalitarian* (or, in the East European political language, anticommunist). Since communism had turned ideology into a state religion and since Leninist ideology appeared to the people as the name of their oppression, the revolts were also *anti-ideological*. Most of these rebellions originated in the widespread frustration with the political cynicism of the ruling elites and acquired therefore *antipolitical* dimensions.

That distrust of anything smacking of behind-the-scenes, Machiavellian arrangements explains the current reluctance of people to engage in political activism: politics is perceived as the marketplace of social climbers, opportunists, imposters, and adventurers. In all these countries, there was a general suspicion of governmental attempts to organize personal life and invade any domain of privacy. This explains the *antistatist* and *antihierarchical* dimensions of the upheaval as well as the ongoing difficulties in building up new principles of authority. Although it is not mentioned frequently, there is a current anarchist temptation in Eastern and Central Europe that runs parallel to the search for statist protection that can be called the *paternalistic temptation*.

In countries like Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia, the long-beleaguered underground groups and movements spearheaded the spontaneous outbursts of discontent and provoked the nonviolent collapse of communist autocracies. The roundtable negotiations and the peaceful transitions to protopluralist forms of government in these countries were guaranteed by the relative maturity of the civil societies and the disintegration of communist elites, symbolized by the inevitable split between the "hawks" (Stalinist conservatives) and the reform-minded (Gorbachevite) liberals. At the same time, it is the tension between moral apprehensions (the antipolitical viewpoint) and institutional obligations that explains certain hesitations and reservations among former opposition groups.

Because civil society was underdeveloped or frail in Romania and Bulgaria and because the communist elites were unable to offer any alternative to their disastrous policies, the transitions were significantly different there. In Romania, the euphoria of the first days of the post-Ceausescu period was followed by the bitter realization that the National Salvation Front, instead of identifying itself with antitotalitarian ideals, had only self-servingly and pragmatically appropriated them. In his speech at a conference in Timisoara this spring, "Power and Opposition in Post-Communist Societies," Nicolae Manolescu, one of Romania's prominent intellectuals and currently the chairman of the Civic Alliance

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Party (a political group similar to the Czechoslovak Civic Forum), gave the following analysis of the situation in his country as well as an idea of the path to be pursued: ". . . we had a revolution driving out the dictator but failing to destroy communism. The old structures were restored with new names. Sometimes, even the same people can be met there. . . . Where East European societies consider themselves to be traveling the road of reform, they should know they are chasing an illusion. For communism is not reformable – it can only be destroyed. And until the last germ of communism has been removed, our societies will have no peace and no chance to establish democracy."

According to Stelian Tanese, another influential Romanian civic activist and editor of the weekly *Acum* (*Now*), the basic contradiction in post-Ceausescu Romania consists of the conflict between the embryonic civil society (most of which is represented by extraparliamentary opposition) and the state that has inherited the totalitarian structures. With regard to the Bulgarians, their opposition managed to organize and overcome internecine strife. However, according to civic activist and political philosopher Dimitrina Petrova: "The hope for real political pluralism is rooted in an awareness of fluidity: the whole process has just begun. Opposing interest groups are not yet clearly defined, insofar as the relations of property are not yet constituted and the specific form of market awaiting us in the future is not yet fixed. At the moment we live in an open situation, not in a system of any kind; we experience the responsibility of trying to understand it, while participating in the creation of the political stereotypes of tomorrow."

At this moment, intellectuals from all the postcommunist countries are engaged in a soul-searching investigation of long-concealed social and historical realities. As it is known, in spite of their international rhetoric, communists have always encouraged the nationalists' autarky. It is therefore vitally important for civic activists and critical intellectuals in all the former communist states to embark on an open and uninhibited dialogue. Because if it is true that Serbia or Romania lag behind the Czech and Slovak republics in terms of pluralist development (or, some may argue, if Slovakia lags behind Bohemia, and Serbia behind Slovenia), it is nevertheless obvious that all these societies have experienced similar torments provoked by similar causes. They were all victimized in the name of a pseudo-universalistic teleology according to which a classless utopia could and should be constructed, regardless of the people's will. They are all now faced with the enormous challenge of creating the legal framework that would grant the procedural expression of the most important underpinning of democracy: popular sovereignty. To quote an illuminating statement made by Agnes Heller, who took issue with Timothy Garton Ash's frequently quoted argument that nothing new (no

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new idea, institution, or phenomenon) has come out of the antitotalitarian upheaval in East-Central Europe: "Political revolutions happen or take place by the change in sovereignty. In these terms, a political revolution took place in all previous Soviet satellite states in the year 1989, for popular sovereignty has been substituted for party sovereignty in all of them, at least *de jure*, if not necessarily also *de facto*."

All these societies have been deprived of civic culture to a greater or lesser extent. In all of them the individual has been repressed, regimented, and manipulated as a simple pawn by the powers-that-be. These countries are all experiencing today the revival of politics as the liberated space where the most human features of the individual find their natural expression. And, one might add, all have rediscovered the value of the revolutionary experience and, as a corollary, morality as a major source of political behavior. To those who claim that no new ideas have emerged during the antitotalitarian upheavals in Eastern and Central Europe, one is tempted to answer that it was during these uprisings (or revolutions or rebellions – the best term remains to be found) that concepts like popular sovereignty, European consciousness, civic rights, and many others re-acquired full semantic justification. During such momentous times people have the chance to become part and parcel of the dream for the Great Republic, or, to use Hannah Arendt's term, they rehabilitate the "revolutionary tradition and its lost treasury."

Communism cannot be considered completely dead. It is true that in its traditional form, as a messianic, militaristic, fanatic movement, it has been defeated from the historical point of view. With the grotesque exception of those incurably possessed, nobody takes seriously the communist ideology. On the other hand, the recent events in Slovakia and Yugoslavia as well as the growth of populist-authoritarian movements in most of these countries has shown that democracy is not the inevitable successor to communism.

One of the prevailing illusions during the postcommunist euphoric stage was that xenophobia and other outbursts of the tribalist, pseudo-communitarian, and mystical-romantic spirit would remain merely a marginal phenomenon. But as the economic situation has continued to deteriorate and the new elites have failed to offer persuasive models for a rapid transition, these movements have gained momentum. They recruit primarily among the frustrated and disenchanted social groups by stirring responsive chords in those unable to overcome the traumatic effects of a sudden break with the past. In countries with large national minorities, these demagogic movements play upon ethnic resentments and phobias. We sometimes have the disturbing feeling of an historical *deja vu*: histrionics and hysteria commingle in explosions of intolerance and exclusiveness. Indeed, the dividing line now seems to separate the pro-European

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parties, inspired by liberal values and their counterparts who look for inspiration in the exaltation of collective nouns such as *fatherland*, *nation*, *ancestors*, or even *blood community*. The conflict is less between communists and anticommunists than between collectivism and liberalism. The latter is pro-Western, tolerant, interested in dialogue, and supportive of rapid marketization. The former is atavistic, resentful, xenophobic, militaristic, and exclusive. Not only has Ralf Dahrendorf mentioned the risk of derailment into new forms of dictatorship, including Fascist ones, but also Adam Michnik, who wrote:

> Nationalism is reborn, and with it national conflicts, xenophobia and the nightmare of anti-Semitism. The conspiracy theory of history makes its return. . . . Countries with a weak democratic tradition, which are in the midst of regaining their national identity, are rehabilitating their national history. They have rehabilitated that which in the communist period was banned, everything which was supposed to have been removed from the pages of national history and from the collective memory. Today the rehabilitation goes on even when it is least deserved, when there are the most disgraceful crimes on its conscience, including collaboration with the Nazis. Consider the conflict over the future in postcommunist states. This conflict, in which one finds the same terms with which we are familiar from debates in the West, is in fact quite different. Its origins lie not in a conflict between left and right, even if there are forces on the political scene which use these terms to denote their direction. Nor is it a conflict between conservatism and liberalism, any more than it is one between radicalism and moderation. It is a conflict over the form the new country is to be given: whether it is to imitate European models, or whether it is to follow its own road by elaborating a radically different kind of model.

Think of the exclusivity displayed by the Romanian fundamentalists, often linked to the ruling formation in that country (the National Salvation Front) and the appearance of such phenomena as the "Party X," under the eccentric Peruvian-Canadian émigré Stanislaw Tyminski in Poland. Their only ideological ingredient is an ill-defined sense of historical malaise, a refusal of the consequences of modernity and a celebration of the presumably pristine values of the pre-industrial, agrarian life. All of those who advocate integration in democratic Europe are the targets for smear campaigns and are stigmatized as agents of a universal Zionist-plutocratic-Masonic conspiracy.

One should not exaggerate, however, the dark colors in this picture and the difficulties of the ongoing evolution from totalitarianism to a different political order based on the rule of law. Compared to 1987, we

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can now certainly say that the communist states cannot and, in fact, did not survive – at least not the countries of the former Soviet "external" empire. Leninist regimes did irrevocably fall apart. But the legacy of the Leninist system, including its cultural and moral elements, is much more complex and stubborn than any one had foreseen. For transitions to successfully occur and to result in the emergence of open societies, some factors are indispensable. First, a pluralist political space with genuine political parties must emerge. Second, the relationship between power and opposition must be redefined upon the understanding that the existence of a powerful and dynamic opposition is essential for the healthy functioning of a democracy. Third, a political elite must emerge, one that, despite all the natural divergences, can agree on the ultimate values characteristic of an open society, including the role of the market, the protection of the individual, and the indispensable guarantees for minorities.

Yet while the democratic orientation of the mainstream political discourse seems unquestionable, we should not gloss over the persistence of unavowed fears, phobias, and frustrations, the neurotic syndrome that explains the readiness of many individuals to join ethnocentric, nebulously prophetic movements. As we sadly know from the experience of Weimar Germany, democracy is not immune to such movements. On the other hand, democratic polities can defend themselves if they eliminate self-serving illusions and identify the social and psychological motivations of populist extremism. To deny these motivations and to limit oneself to a rhetoric of self-glorification is hardly a way to strengthen the victories of the last two years. As these societies have extricated themselves from the communist morass, their alternatives have ranged from real democracy to fundamentalist ethnocracy. In addition to the difficulties created by economic renewal, they have inherited the political, social, and cultural crises provoked by Communism. To avoid the exploitation of these tensions by movements grounded in resentment and hatred, to prevent the emergence of a combination of extreme right and left "indigenous" radicalism, fledgling democratic institutions need to create a counterbalance at the level of social psychology. Democratic politics is not founded on myths and emotions but on the modest and patient search for those impersonal procedures that foster what totalitarianism wanted to destroy: the accountability of political power and the existence of an independent judiciary and other institutions that aim to protect and not to humiliate the individual. Building these institutions transcends the will of a political party: it entails the individual in its integrity, because the roots of liberty lie in the awareness that no government has the right to assign to itself the power to limit this freedom.

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POEMS

Czeslaw Milosz

Far Away

"Great love makes a great grief"
– Skarga

The chronicler is breathing, his heart is beating.
This is rare among chroniclers, for they are usually dead.
He tries to describe the earth as he remembers it
I.e. to describe on that earth his first love
For a girl bearing some ordinary name
From whom he will never again receive a letter
And who astonishes him by her strong existence
So that she seems to dictate what he writes.

It happened a long, long time ago.
In a city which was like an oratorio
Shooting with its ornate towers up to the sky
Into the white clouds, from among green hills.
We were growing there next to each other, unaware of it,
In the same legend: about a subterranean river
Nobody has ever seen, about a basilisk
Under a medieval tower, about a secret passage
Which led from the city to a remote island
With the ruins of a castle in the middle of the lake.
Every spring we took the same delight in the river:
Ice is breaking, it flows, and look, ferry boats
Painted in blue and green stripes,
And majestic raft trains drift to the sawmills.

In the sun of April we were walking in the crowd.
Expectation was timid, nameless.
and only now, when every "he loves me, loves me not"
Is fulfilled, when ridicule and grief
Are alike and I am at one
With those girls and boys, saying farewell,
I realize how strong their love was for their city.
Though they were unaware, it was to last them a lifetime.
They were destined to live through the loss of their country,

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To search for a souvenir, a sign, something that does not perish.
And had I to offer a gift to her, I would choose this:
I would place her among the dreams of architecture,
There, where St. Ann and the Bernardins,
St. John and the Missionaries meet the sky.

2

In the scent of savory, there where the path
Winds down towards the alders and the rushes
Of a small lake, in the sun, beehives.
The unchanging bees of our forest country
Work, as always, on the day we perish.

She was quick. She shouted: "Now!
No time to lose!" – and they grabbed the children,
They ran that path, from the house, by the alders, into the swamp.
The soldiers came out of the birch grove, were surrounding the house,
They had left their truck in the woods, so as not to scare people away.
"They did not think to let the dog loose,
It would have certainly led them to us."
Thus our country was ending, still generously
Protective with its osiers, mosses, wild rosemaries.
Long trains were moving eastward, towards Asia,
With the laments of those who knew they would not return.

Bees fly, heavy, to their mead breweries,
White clouds drift slowly, reflected in the lake.
Our heritage will be handed to unknown people.
Will they respect the hives, nasturtiums by the porch,
Carefully weeded patches, the slanting apple trees?

3

But yes, the restaurant's name was "A Cozy Nook."
How could I have forgotten! Does it mean
I did not want to remember? And the city was falling
Into its sleepy moulting, into a long season
Of people I could not imagine. It hardly, hardly
Returns. Why in my poems is there so little
Autobiography? Where did it come from, the idea
To hide what is my own as if it were sick?
Then, in the "Cozy Nook" I was still one
Of the gentlemen, students and officers, before whom
Little Matthew's waiters would put a carafe

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Of vodka straight from the ice, misty with dew,
And to be adult made you proud,
Just as you felt proud coming of good stock.
This took place in a Europe of swamps and pine forests,
Of horse carts creaking on sandy highways.
Little Matthew, obliging, circulated among the tables.
Was he to become an informer? Or has he gone
To a gulag on one of the Syberian rivers?

4

How stupid is the business of the State.
I should not write about it and yet I do.
For, after all, one pities people.

Here where I live they buy and sell
Every hour of the day and night.
In halls sprinkled with bluish light they heap
Fruits brought from five continents,
Fish and meats from the East and West,
Snails and oysters summoned against the clock,
Liquors fermented in sultry valleys.
I have nothing against the Polinesias in shop windows,
Against a virgin nature at a modest price.
And if I object, I keep it to myself, it's simpler.
I am not from here. From a remote province,
From a remote continent
Where I had learned the nature of the State.

By a river in the evening, our choral singing.
We were living beyond marshes, beyond woods,
Thirty kilometers from the nearest railway station,
In manors, yeomen's lodges, farmhouses, hamlets.
Our singing was about division: this here
Is ours, that over there is alien, here poverty, there wealth,
Here ploughing, there trading, here virtue, there sin,
Here faithfulness to the ancestors, there treason,
And the worst of all, if one should sell his forest.
The oaks stood there for ages, now they were falling
With thunderous echoes, so that the earth trembled.
And then the road to our parish church
Led no more through shade with songs of birds
But through empty and silent clearings,
And that was like a presage of every kind of loss.

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We implored the protection of the Miraculous Virgin,
We accompanied organ music with Latin chants.
Generation after generation we lived against the State
Which would not overcome us either with threat or punishment.
Till a perfect State appeared on the earth.

The state is perfect if it takes away
From every man his name, sex, dress, and manner,
And carries him at dawn, insane with fear,
Where, no one knows, to steppes, deserts,
So that its power is revealed
And, wallowing in their filth,
Hungry, humiliated, men renounce their right.
What did we know of this? Nothing at all.
And later on there were none among us
Who would be able to tell the world about this new knowledge.
The age passes, memory passes. Nobody will find
Letters begging for help, graves without crosses.

JOSEPH BRODSKY

Odysseus to Telemachus

My Telemachus,
The Trojan War
is done. Who won . . . is anybody's guess.
Presumably the Greeks did; only Greeks
could hurl so many corpses out of houses . . .
And anyway, the homeward-headed road's
turned out to be too long, as if Poseidon,
while we were wasting time there, stretched the space.
I don't know where I am, what lies ahead.
Some filthy island, bushes, buildings, stones,
great grunting pigs, a garden overgrown,
some sort of queen, and grass . . . Telemachus,
all islands look alike to one who's traveled

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so long; and the brain trips us, counting waves;
eyes, polluted with horizon, blear;
and liquefying flesh clogs up the ears.
I don't remember how the war turned out . . .
I don't remember now how old you are.

Grow, Telemachus, my son, grow big.
Only the gods know if we'll meet again.
It's years already since you were that infant
I reined the oxen in to save. If not
for Palamedes, we'd have lived together.
But maybe he was right: apart from me
you will be saved from Oedipal desires,
and, my Telemachus, have sinless dreams.

Translated from the Russian by Harry Thomas

RICHARD HOWARD

Writing Off

All participation in art is based
on the existence of others.
-Hebbel

"In a field," our new laureate once said,
"I am the absence of field,"
resigned if not resolved to be missing
in action, missing in passion –
forsaking as a form of *being-there*!

To live on nothing is one theorem
which Thoreau would have understood;
and not only to live on it, to let
Nothing do our living for us . . .
It is the converse claim I wish to lodge,

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a premise that I am because I make
some sign of presence, all
that is signified by the marvellous
post-juridicial compound
self-evident. The claim is likely

to be clamorous, uncivil, often
sacrilegious in its effects
(hence the tendency to label it
no less than a misdemeanor,
more likely a mania). I refer

to the patently incorrigible
yen to inscribe our handiwork,
or rather the play of our hands, upon
whatever amplitude is bare
and blank enough to show that we were there.

As a rule the billboards are not put up
to put up with our marauding,
and it is a tribute to the discretion
of our poet's heretical
heroism that he scores identity

by absconding the evidence of it,
withdrawing himself from the scene.
Most of us are not like that. We require
a signature; KILROY WAS HERE
we scratch on the fresh paint somehow, and sigh

with authorial satisfaction. Now
behold the field from which Mark Strand
proclaims himself absent: here is a wall
and at its base a ruined car
filled with spray-cans that strew the ground as well,

and every inch of wall and car and ground
is covered, cancelled, *encrusted*
with the spirit-writing known as graffito,
cursive abuse, cacography
which by its very glut becomes glamor,

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a collaborative chaos of uncials,
illegible and thus elect.
According to Erdmann (*Arabische Schriftkunst*
als Ornamente, Bonn, 1910)
"Writing is one form of art in general

whose aesthetic aspect is often so
hypertrophied as to neglect
its chief purpose as communication . . .
Horror vacui is of great
influence in the arrangement of signs."

Erdmann is right. The wall cannot be read
as anything but palimpsest,
elemental commands made vacuous
by the subsequent autograph
of those who obeyed them. Writing alone

appears to count, a thousand words worth no
picture, "graphic," as we observe;
the quenched car is so tangled in a scurf
of scribbles (the moving finger
having writ) that waves seem to have broken

over the ravaged and obviously tireless
machine in opalescent foam,
a sea of troubles unopposed, unended . . .
Bonnard, who could never leave off
retouching his canvases, would envy

these scaling laminations, pellicles
of self-assertion which has turned
anonymous by superfetation. Here
perhaps our laureate is met,
for these scriveners have made something

occasioned only when no one member
conspicuously functions
in the field – repressed *and* represented
by unspecifiable rinds
and flakes. (How many times we must peruse

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these depths before the deepest impulse floats
to the surface and is legible:
the inennarable FUCK which appears
only after the eye has long
frequented more decorous instances!)

Theirs is a polypoid scheme – a structure
of self-immolating moilers
(like the pyramids and the cathedrals)
wreaked upon the carapace of
what pyramids and cathedrals we have . . .

But for all the luscious integument,
a variorum of texture
any post-impressionist might covet,
is it meant to be seen? The wall,
the filthy field, the gutted car engorged

with the spray-cans which have given their all
are unknown to view, closeted
from the eagerest archeologist
of our cities' decline and fall.
Only a fluke snapshot insists: *this was*,

and my words, irresolute witness to
such performance. I used to think
graffiti meant nothing but insolence,
the mean and meager vandalism
which was all *ressentiment* could muster,

yet the wasted splendor of an empty
lot in east Los Angeles
redefines the state of the art: how much
of the world's making was never
intended for human eyes! Luxor, Lascaux,

sacred places where we learn we can change
our faith without changing gods (and
vice versa) . . . To which I add the image
of an unvisitable shrine
where obscure artisans have succeeded

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in transcending the five destinies
by which we claim to be guided:
mind body nation language home. This is
how we learn, by just such unseen
art, to approach the divine. Next slide please.

THEODORE WEISS

A Matter of Degree

It's all, you know, a matter
of degree. So a rock's a noun,
a river's a verb, and in between
a tree.
But look again
and "rock" you'll see can be
as active as you like: a "river,"
dwindling
into a "stream,"
seems fast asleep until a storm
"streams" it to ape a spate
of sea.
And should a tiger,
ravenously clawing just below,
"tree" you up a lofty, puny limb
that "tree,"
however serving
birds and squirrels, proves an
inbetween of quiverings to rival
yours.
Or as the blind seer
observed, "The show depends on
how you look at it. Each thing's
a going concern."

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II

Some that
seem a monument time passed by –
you swirled around them like
their flimsy dream –
if you
could synchronize with these,
you'd spy sweeping along, coat-
tails flying:
stones are hurled
as much as you, and in their
own good time they plunge
like any cataract
self-absorbed.
As for the midges carrying out
their lives in a single day,
you, could they
notice you,
would seem a petrified eternity,
as common as the air, shaped
as nothing at all.
A god
has to be a someone (someone?)
who no matter how close he comes
magnificently hides.

MARGUERITE BOUVARD

Power

Two abreast, the Mothers alight at the door
of the Casa Rosada. As usual, they arrive with the precise
consonance of migrating birds. But the President's secretary
wrings her hands, "El Presidente is away. We do not know
when he will return." "We have an appointment,
we will wait," the Mothers reply. "Senoras," the secretary protests.
The Mothers can't hear her. There aren't enough chairs
in the waiting room and they are busy ferrying some in.

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Unlike Odysseus, they know where they are going
and what a straight line is. The day wears on.
Evening, the palace empties. The Mothers feel
quite at home, but the night cleaners cannot come in.
morning comes and the Mothers
are barricaded behind the front door. The government officials,
their assistants and their sub-assistants must enter
through the back door. Everyone is embarrassed.
After lunch, an emissary of the President
comes out to ask the Mothers if they will speak with him.
The Mothers understand the political process.
They will take a vote and then they will announce their decision.

ELIZABETH REES

Multiple Personality

Once the fire caught and spit,
it licked the beams of my home,
how could I have known?
All my life I knew I was meant for
something bad, all my life
I waited for this child.
The nine years I had him
were the only nine I lived.
I begged the firemen to find him,
but he drowned in the fire. He died
in twenty minutes, tell me
twenty minutes is too short.

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Death licked its teeth
and crawled over my baby.
When I heard his voice, the fire
leapt on me, I couldn't see, I
grabbed a wind that wasn't there,
my black eyes filled with blackness.
I ran for help, I ran and ran
and reached nowhere and no one
and all alone in horror, I knew
this was the end of a world,
I saw the devil smile at me.

I had an off-white comforter on my bed
and after the fire it was covered
with soot, it was all ash
except for the outline of his bent
body, because he'd reached my bed,
the bed I'd been in
with my grandfather and brothers.
My baby died in that bed.
I have seven personalities
and each has a name and story,
each one wakes me differently.
It happens through a nightmare
that makes me seize and I get

wild as a fist's thrash, I see
colors, hear it come from far off.
One of my personalities told me
to light a candle, the candle
that did it, perfect Sabbath white.
I dipped the wick into a flame
and leaned it toward the floor.
Perfect Sabbath candle consumed
a child with its shine, candle said,
"Come closer, come over here
and let me kiss you."

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TORY DENT

Walking Away I

Persimmons spurned underfoot the churlish path where no path exists
Already the famous shimmering from the unguarded pond up ahead,
the lavender loveletter that revises itself by resurfacing again and again.
Your face, smoothed like a stone overturned by the sea in my brain
the incorrigible memory contrived to its seafaring metonymical place.
Beloved, the stone weighs me down necessarily, analogous to the
weights
used by astronauts and sea divers to achieve equilibrium in their voyages;
the stone, the loveletter overturned in the poem I rewrite like a
loveletter.

Certainly there's promised a clearing beyond the forest all of us believe in
if only subliminally when we glance at the fuschia horizon and wish
if only subliminally, as we always do, that things were different.
Toward the clearing, toward the horizon, upon the sea, within the
sstreet,
persimmons, movie stubs, exquisite odds from the ocean's bottom
spurn underfoot while we caress their natural likenesses in our pockets.

SIMON PERCHIK

334

Each Halloween and lifting the door
I back away in horror, throwing apples
– the dead are always hungry
but on this night already icing over
they come without moving their lips

– even these sweets smell from ashes
from snow burning to the ground and you
are water now, wandering door to door
the way mountainsides sometimes forget
and nothing can be heard
except this thin waxpaper, unfolded
crackling in my hands.

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For this first frost
I set a trap :your grave
as if some candy bar once unsealed
would flow again – with each step
I'm falling through the Earth
overtaking name by name.

You did not come tonight, the dirt
must still be warm from fruit
and sandwiches – at the door
with one hand out
I tell something to eat
not to forget where it eats
where it sleeps and in half.

HEBERTO PADILLA*

The Rose, its specter
(Rilke)

The rose is above
and the thorn below.
When Rilke bends down
to pick the rose,
he is unaware, the poor man,
that its specter pursues him
(and transfigures him),
because all beauty
is glory and disaster.

---

*Selected from *A Fountain, A House of Stone* by Heberto Padilla, translated by Alastair Reid and Alexander Coleman, to be published in November by Farrar, Straus & Giroux. Translation copyright © 1991 by Alastair Reid and Alexander Coleman. All rights reserved.

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EMILY HIESTAND

Between the snow, crows

for Peter Niels Dunn

Hoar settles in the elm's sound crook
rough-wondrous as rangy woodland moss,
and limns the long-swagged limbs that look
upon through beyond a liminal loss.

Comes the lightest, most buoyant of snows
shook shagged from a vibrant beard,
proof-positive of laughing gods – and crows
who swim and soar in a swarm-path cleared

purely by wings, hollow-bones, the right
of way of crows that flows
unknown, shown on wing, black in white,
borne buoyant, again, as aerated prose.

The material flecks of an average sacrifice –
willing with no will, being the price –
sieve an airy clarity containing, providing
the unseen unsung onriding

WILLIS BARNSTONE

On the Floor of the Creation

I wait. Is there a second when we do
not wait? Quevedo made a man so thin
he was a fork, with rats housed in one shoe,

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roaches rooming in the other. Yet in
his heart already yellowing like teeth,
he dreamt of shining at the court. We wait
(in Romance it means *hope*) but underneath
the coming (never here) of desolate
and flaming death is the sad going (never gone)
of every second since the flood at Ur.
I pull the shade. Sun. Suddenly the damp
Midwest is Babylon. I'm on the floor
of the Creation, under a clay lamp,
a child, captive to hope, scheming at dawn.

CHARLES BAUDELAIRE

The Blind People

What is the difference between the unlimited
blackness they walk in this ridiculous
fashion through, and the eternal silence?
The sounds of the city, with all its laughter and music,
are a denial I walk through with my stupid
questions when I look at them. What are they
looking up at the sky for, with such blind
scrutinizing? Just think about them. How foolish,
and terrible, they look; weird; sleepwalkers;
puppets on a string, the divine light gone
forever from their eyes. They keep on staring
up at the sky; you never see them bow
their dreaming heads in noble meditation
over the pavements of the raucous city.

Translated from the French by David Ferry

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GEORGE EDWARDS

Music and Postmodernism

Many of the current controversies in literary criticism have finally begun to invade the study of music as well. Recent books such as *Music and the Politics of Culture*, *Music and Society*, and Jacques Attali's *Noise* have found new ways to account for the extramusical significance of music. Instead of understanding music in terms of the human body, dance, myth, religion, narrative, poetry, drama, pictorial imagery, mathematics, philosophy, psychology, or the natural sciences, they relate it to its social and cultural context, emphasizing class, race, and gender. The most powerful tools of such approaches are Marxism and deconstruction.

Among the traditional academic fields of music, the ascendancy of the study of music in its social and cultural context might be interpreted as the penetration of historical musicology by ethnomusicology. The ethnomusicologist Dieter Christensen, for instance, defines his field as "the study of music as a cultural phenomenon (in contrast to that of music as an 'art')." Yet most socially informed writing on music is by non-musicians whose primary loyalties lie elsewhere. Their colonization of music reflects the marginal position of music in our society, the popular assumption that music is esoteric and occult, the abysmal condition of music criticism (especially in the United States), and the slowness with which musical scholars notice and take into account developments in other fields.

Academic interlopers who lack any identifiable expertise in music are quick to point out the insularity of most musical scholarship, and to find explanations for it. These writers believe that there are three related attitudes typical of the academic study of music: 1)what is scientifically verifiable is legitimate (positivism); 2)individual works of art, in isolation, provide all the information needed for understanding them (autonomism); and 3)musical meaning is expressible only by music (absolutism). Using the term 'formalism' to cover all three of these independent positions, Christopher Norris, who wrote the introduction to *Music and the Politics of Culture*, claims that "it is a doctrine mostly subscribed to by conservative thinkers who want to drive a wedge between musical understanding and the wider context of worldly and sociopolitical concerns."

But how effective are these wedges of the "formalists"? Positivism would rule out of court what cannot be disproven, which includes most ways of formulating value judgments, many but not all statements about

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music in relation to other fields, and many useful analytical observations. Although positivism may have done as much harm as good, it helps us to distinguish between what is either true or false (if often trivial) and what may be suggestive, or profound, but speculative.

Autonomism is a dead horse. Even Milton Babbitt a strong proponent of positivism, insists that "you can't possibly regard a piece of music as having nothing to do with anything but itself." What then is the context required to understand it? The context of the individual piece, like that of a stone thrown into a pond, weakens as you move outwards from the specific event into space and time; perhaps it gets stronger as you approach the origin of the stone or the nature of the thrower.

Absolutism in one sense is almost incontestable: no one, I hope, would want to replace Mozart's G minor symphony with an analysis of it, a poetic or programmatic account of it, or a decoding of its political position. Yet Babbitt's dismissal of autonomism could be directed at absolutism as well. Music means something, but no single attempt to account for that meaning can expect to encompass it in its entirety.

Opposition to 'formalism' in the discussion of music, however, is directly related to the opposition of postmodernism to the organic, complete, and nonrepresentational work of art. The current polemics against 'formalism' should not blind us to the fact that we must be able to make use of the analytic techniques developed by 'formalist' views of music. Flawed and incomplete as they are, they are the best tools we have for musical analysis. However, the interest of most socially concerned writers about music is not how their disciplines can inform the study of music, but how music can be brought into line with their particular social and political agendas. In this emphasis on context, rather than on the individual work, they are aided by the tendency of musicology to concern itself with either establishing a reliable text or placing the text in a historical framework, bypassing criticism. The musicological terror of confronting individual pieces unless heavily armed is typified by the title of a recent scholarly book, *Mozart's Symphonies: Context, Performance Practise, Reception.*

To a bystander (though, as a composer and academic, not an innocent one), it seems odd that Marxist approaches are so prominent in recent writing about music; for Marxism is hardly flourishing in the political arena. Does the value of such criticism depend on one's politics? Or does it flow from Marxism's ability to bring a unified perspective to all human concerns? Is Marxist cultural criticism meant to create a culture which will pave the way for a Marxist society? Or does the deflection of Marxist thought from politics to art represent Marxism's degeneration into an academic commodity?

The postmodern attempt to decode the social and political content

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of music, like all discussion of music, is forced to argue by analogy. We cannot insist on scientific verifiablity; but we need not be bullied by rhetorical devices disguised as evidence. When we read that "classical music is deeply rooted in bourgeois society," we should be prepared to resist the apparently inevitable conclusion that "classical music expresses bourgeois values." Perhaps it does – but we are free to insist on better evidence than the genetic fallacy can provide.

We must be alert to a favorite rhetorical device of postmodern writers: making grandiose claims which they then implicitly retract. Here is Richard Leppert's withdrawal from the abyss:

> . . . music's role is limited to that of affirming . . . policies of imperialist aggrandizement and suppression of human rights. This is not to suggest that music and musicians . . . were responsible for the British Empire and the East India Company. But it is to suggest that the role assigned to music in the culture was primarily one of either affirming the status quo or at least not tampering with it.

Similarly, Jacques Attali appears to regard the music pen as stronger than the sword:

> Later, Charlemagne would forge the cultural and political unity of his kingdom by imposing the universal practise of Gregorian chant, resorting to armed force to accomplish that end.

Such rhetorical dishonesty is almost inevitable when music is subordinated to politics. Like many later writers about the political and social significance of music (but for much better reasons), Plato, for example, had no conception of music not intimately connected to verbal expression or social circumstance. To find out what kind of music was objectionable, he asked only with what kind of words or behavior it was associated. It is in this light that we should understand a statement like the following (which many parents of rock-loving teenagers would agree with):

> For a change to a new type of music is something to beware of as a hazard to all our fortunes. For the modes of music are never disturbed without unsettling of the most fundamental political and social conventions . . .

But such claims, while often made, for instance, by Attali, are not

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easy to demonstrate. It seems more plausible, for example, to assume that *Le Sacre du Printemps* and *Pierrot Lunaire* reflected social changes which had already occurred than to imagine that they helped to cause World War I.

Plato rejects the view that music is "only a form of play," and thus does no harm:

> Nor does it work any . . . except that by gradual infiltration it softly overflows upon the characters and pursuits of men and from these issues forth grown greater to attack their business dealings, and from these relations it proceeds against the laws and constitution with wanton license, Socrates, till finally it overthrows all things public and private.

The mesmerizing crescendo of music's effects is also duplicated by Plato's prose. By a sleight of hand (keeping 'music' the subject of this sinuous sentence) he blames music – accused only of changing men's character and pursuits – for all the harm men subsequently do. It seems that for Plato, music does harm (or inculcates principles of law and order) without our knowledge, whether we listen or not, and perhaps more effectively if we don't. This view of music is certainly suggested by Wagner's description of its subversive power (in a letter to Hans von Bülow):

> . . . art consists precisely in communicating the strongest and most unusual feelings to a listener in such a way that . . . he yields unresistingly, as it were, to an ingratiating allurement and thus involuntarily assimilates even what is most alien to his nature.

It is essential to Wagner that such assimilation of (ideological?) poison take place subliminally – one reason for hiding his orchestra underneath the stage. Film music, too, should not be too obtrusive if it is to mold our emotional responses without our knowledge; and to *listen* to muzak (whatever its pedigree) is to see through its attempt to make us buy things or to allay our anxiety in airports or elevators.

Plato's view of music leads naturally to the desire to control it, as if it were a potentially dangerous drug. This desire is not less ominous when one's program for music is populist or "democratic": music "of the people, by the people, and for the people" is the ideal of totalitarian Philistines like Goebbels and Zhdanov. Yet the alternative (viewing music as having no social or political impact) is almost equally unattractive. We can claim that the more attention we pay to music (which is to say: the

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more we view it as art) the less it influences our behavior. Such a claim would cause us to be shocked, but not surprised, that men who loved Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, and who spent their evenings playing Schubert's chamber music, could also willingly participate in genocide. Western democracies typically encourage the consumption of music as art, and claim to regard it as of little political importance: like coffee and chocolate, music is no longer perceived as a dangerous stimulant. It all too easily becomes a useless pastime or a mere social ornament.

If we care about music and want it to be taken seriously as a social and political force, we will want to take care that interpreting it as such will not make it vulnerable once again to totalitarian control. According to Arac, Trilling's generation "eradicated from American culture the dangers of Stalinism; now that it is gone, we are again free to explore possibilities on the left." However, *nothing* in politics is eradicated for all time. Even Zhdanov still has his supporters, at least in Great Britain. Malcolm Barry's contribution to *Music and the Politics of Culture* treats Zhdanov's notorious speech to the Union of Soviet Composers Congress of 1948 as "a middle-brow reaction to contemporary music that could be voiced anywhere in the world" – ignoring that it was the only reaction that then could be voiced in the Soviet Union. He also defends Zhadanov's 1936 *Pravda* article, "Chaos Instead of Music," which "ensured the disappearance of [Shostakovich's] *Lady MacBeth of Mtensk* from the Russian stage," and the duty of the government to intervene. Noting that Shostakovich revised the opera in 1963, Barry asks:

> Could it be that the intervention, brutal and traumatic as it was, might have been *helpful* to the *composer*, even within the context of a "value free" approach to music *as such*?

Barry continually praises the "explicit nature of Soviet Realism as a philosophy of art," in contrast to the implicit ideology of Western aesthetes. But in his introduction Norris discusses Barry's contribution in terms of his own idea that the reception of Shostakovich in the West was distorted by "cold-war ideological imperatives." Without any hint of irony, he describes Barry's essay as an attempt to "grasp what is at stake when music is subjected to such pressures of political and ideological circumstance" – in the West!

Just as Stravinsky's famous claim that "music is, by its very nature, powerless to *express* anything at all" can be understood as an overreaction to the excesses of nineteenth century programmatic readings of 'absolute' music, the retreat of composers in the fifties from "worldy and

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sociopolitical concerns" was an understandable reaction to the repression of advanced music wherever such concerns were paramount. The failure of the university to provide a haven for such composers for long need not be lamented. But it is lamentable when, as with Barry and Morris, intellectual contortions in defense of the repression of modernism come from academics.

Much of the best writing in *Music and the Politics of Culture*, *Music and Society*, and *Noise* virtually ignores actual music in order to focus on the repression of composition or on the excesses of politically interested reception: the French Revolution's program for music, the 'Englishing' of Delius, Elgar as pastoral. But more often these writers merely demonstrate that any (unstated) set of value judgments can be connected with any (stated) political position. This is a game any number can play.

Music then becomes a sort of Rorschach test in which one can find whatever one wants. A tragicomic example is the understanding of Schoenberg's twelve-tone method in political terms in the thirties (Auden's "low dishonest decade"). Some saw the twelve-tone method as inherently democratic, since the twelve tones were, in theory, equal; Milton Babbitt describes this view as "one note, one vote." For others, the control of the series over the twelve 'proletarian' tones signified Bolshevism, or even Nazism (the series as Führer). In "Is It Fair?" Schoenberg ruefully mentions an opera in "twelve-tone style" by the Danish composer Paul von Klenau, which Klenau defended in a Nazi periodical on the grounds that (in Schoenberg's words) "this method is a true image of national-socialist principles." Schoenberg ridiculed all political interpretations of his own music and method, and described his political views as moving from vaguely social democratic to monarchist (from 1914) to apolitical (in America). Evidently Schoenberg's politics were incoherent. But since most people hated Schoenberg's music, they felt free to identify it with whichever political movement they most detested. Adorno defended Schoenberg, in *Philosophy of Modern Music*, as representing the only genuine reaction of bourgeois composition to the twentieth century. The "defense," however, tends to collapse into something like the puerile contention that modern art is chaotic (Mondrian? Klee? Picasso?) because we live in chaotic times. Now that Adorno is coming into fashion again as an unintentional prophet of the postmodern left, Schoenberg may need a defense against him similar to the one Adorno tried to provide for Bach: a defense 'against his devotees.'

Susan McClary's attempt to update Adorno's interpretation of Bach in "The Blasphemy of Talking Politics During Bach Year" is of great interest. For it is one of the few essays by a musical scholar to treat specific pieces in a social context and with an explicit political and post-

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modernist agenda. She ends by proposing the "age old strategy of rewriting the tradition in such a way as to appropriate Bach to our own political ends."

After a lengthy but standard critique of 'formalism' McClary provides a superficial and misleading definition and description of tonality (or, as a 'formalist' would put it, the 'tonal system'). But the first real problem lies in getting from any definition of tonality to her statement that 'the social values it articulates are those held most dear by the middle class: beliefs in progress, in expansion, in the ability to attain ultimate goals through rational striving in the ingenuity of the individual strategist operating both within and in defiance of the norm." McClary expects us to unthinkingly accept the relationship between tonality and middle class values as axiomatic; but, in fact, her reformulation of it is a totally incoherent analogy. Does the tonic represent the 'ultimate goal' attained through 'rational striving'? Or does it represent the social norm which the 'individual strategist' both operates within and defies? Are not progress and expansion inevitably nipped in the bud by the ultimate triumph of the tonic? Does denying the 'formalist' claim that all of the tensions of a piece are resolved within it give the individual enough freedom in relation to the norm?

Tonality is usually and convincingly regarded as a richly layered hierarchy: even McClary recognizes "two or more hierarchical levels" of tonality ("a background progression and surface strategies"). So another problem with McClary's argument is that tonality is so much more hierarchical a means of organizing pitch than those that preceded or followed it. One might therefore think that the aristocracy (who directly or indirectly employed most composers in the eighteenth century) would have found *its* social values confirmed by tonality. McClary's only counter to this suggestion is to claim that the French musical establishment under Louis XIV "recognized all too well the destabilizing, exuberant, subversive character of tonality and tried to prevent its infiltration." But this is an anachronism and a red herring. What the court of the Sun King objected to was the "flamboyant, noisy Italian style" and, above all, the seventeenth-century (i. e. most *pre*-tonal) music she describes in terms of its "fragmented structures, illegitimate dissonances, and its ornate, defiant arabesques."

McClary finds that the subversive elements of the first movement of Bach's Brandenburg Concerto #5 "seems too powerful" to be resolved by its conventional tonal structure and concerto format; and here I would like to agree, since it would justify the presence of two more movements. But what should be a strong argument is so consistently marred by errors and distortions as to make one wonder how she can expect musicians to take it seriously. Is she deliberately courting the kind

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of professional disapproval she reports having encountered "during 1985 in several Bach Year celebrations"?

For McClary, the concerto form "addresses the tensions between the dynamic individual and the stable society," with the former represented by the soloist(s), and the latter by the larger group and its ritornellos. How does this square with saying that "a ritornello represents a microcosm of the entire movement?" This can be the case only if the ritornello compromises its "social" role by incorporating instability. But she suppresses any mention of instability in *this* movement's ritornello (whose phrasing is notably irregular) because that would interfere with her argument: the ritornello must be stable, smug, and self-satisfied.

We can summarize McClary's account of the remainder of the movement as follows: the normal dialectic of the ritornello and the conventional soloists (the flute and violin) is first undermined and then overthrown by the emergence of the harpsichord (from its obscurity as a continuo instrument) into a soloistic agent of violent revolution. The harpsichord only relents, allowing the ritornello to prevail, when "the alternative seems to be madness." This account forces McClary to suppress the entrance of the harpsichord as one of the soloists *immediately* after the first ritornello, where it presents material she associates only with the 'docile' flute and violin. Similarly, her account of the harpsichord 'cadenza' (Bach calls it a "cembalo solo senza stromenti") suppresses its first forty-one measures (out of sixty-five); I therefore presume she finds them as decorous as I do. Her claim that the solo "unleashes elements of chaos, irrationality, and noise until finally it blurs almost entirely the sense of key, meter, and form upon which eighteenth-century style depends" is supposedly substantiated by a musical example. It begins with eight measures of fairly straightforward elaboration of the dominant, followed by elevent measures of dominant pedal: striking and adventurous, but no threat to the tonic. With the arrival of the pedal, the meter (imperiled for five measures – less than a tenth of the solo) is clear and unambiguous. Instead of "finally relenting," the harpsichord relents gradually, allowing itself ("ironically") "to be appropriated" by the social norm. Her "storming of the Bastille" is colorful, yet wildly inappropriate: but if the revolution is averted, it is not by force.

In short, McClary's account of this movement is more sophisticated than the average nineteenth-century programmatic reading of 'abstract' music, but, inexcusably, not more accurate or responsive to what actually happens in the piece. Her "*elements* of chaos . . ." and "blurs almost entirely" seem designed to let her wriggle out of any hole she might climb into. She fails to deliver what her polemical stance would require.

It is not hard to discover either what McClary and other thinkers of the left want of music in the late twentieth century or how their

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musical preferences differ from those of the right. While the right wants to return to the thirties, to the American musical (not political) counterpart of Socialist Realism (the 'American Symphonists'), the left wants to move *forward* to the thirties: towards postmodernism. Neither side has much use for modernism: although individual modernists held right-wing views (Schoenberg's monarchism, Stravinsky's obscurantist anti-Semitism, Webern's delusion that his highly distilled German romanticism would represent just what the Nazis wanted), the right has no more use for modernism than the left.

Postmodernism is hard to define. When did it begin? (Has it begun?) Is it good or bad? Is it a continuation of modernism, or a break with it? Because there are at least two separate strains of leftist thought appropriating musical postmodernism, not all of their positions are entirely consistent with one another.

Among those who see music in essentially social and political terms, there is virtually unanimous hostility to the autonomous 'masterpiece.' The work of art must be incomplete if it is to connect with anything outside itself. It must not only fail to present an 'organic' unity, but must openly challenge any such possibility. In Bakhtin's terms, music should be 'dialogic' rather than 'monologic.' For many leftist writers, classical music is almost automatically 'monologic': dominated by one controlling voice. McClary suggests, however, that if one simply ignores classical music, leaving it to one's enemies, "one may inadvertently contribute to the canon's stranglehold." She must therefore wrest the canon away from the 'formalists' and interpret it as dialogically incorporating, and *not* resolving, the voices of diverse social interests.

Yet even with help like this, the most classical music can hope for from postmodernism is to be regarded as equal to popular and non-Western musics. Once we stop regarding it as 'art' and strip away the defenses of idealist aesthetics, classical music becomes attackable on a variety of grounds. It is said to be vulnerable, among other things, to charges of sexism. According to John Shepherd, for example, male hegemony is essentially visual; male (read: classical) music therefore concentrates on what can be *notated* visually (pitch and rhythm) and rationally controlled. It largely ignores more intuitive (feminine) areas such as timbre. Even worse is the involvement of classical music with imperialism, cultural or otherwise. Cultural imperialism is seen not just in relation to the third world, nor merely as attempted social control of the masses (see Lawrence W. Levine's *Highbrow/Lowbrow* for a good account), but also as the experience of every child forced to take piano lessons.

When music is studied in its social and cultural context, *all* music becomes of equal interest. As Shepherd says, "My own involvement in the sociology of music is as a musicologist concerned to see all music

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taken seriously as a social and cultural form, and, consequently, to see 'popular' music accorded the same status as 'serious' music as an object worthy of study in university music departments."

I am uneasy with the potential confusion between sociological and aesthetic categories inherent in a phrase like 'an object worthy of study.' For when, for example, a painting previously attributed to Rembrandt is reattributed to someone else, it loses more than its market value. It may well cease, through no fault of its own, to be 'an object worthy of study.' Deprived of the attention given to masterpieces, it will no longer be a masterpiece. If treating popular music as 'worthy of study' is a first step to validating it as 'art,' then high and low art will have changed places, and the claim not to be interested in music as 'art' will seem to have been a hypocritical ploy.

Music and Society, *Music and the Politics of Culture*, and *Noise* pay remarkably little attention to non-Western music. It is left to ethnomusicologists to worry about the ability of non-Western musics to survive intensive Westernization. Nor does anyone seem particularly concerned to protect the tradition of Western classical music against non-Western musics. Either classical music is seen as moribund and not worth saving, or its tradition is considered strong enough to absorb influences from the third world. Such absorption, usually on a fairly superficial level, is a leading characteristic of much postmodern music.

Yet a much stronger strain in leftist writing about postmodernism is the desirability of a return to the vernacular, a term variously understood as referring to folk music, classical tonality (or the earlier modes), or popular music. In this and several other respects, even Goebbels could be appropriated to postmodernism. As he wrote to Furtwängler in 1933, "the task of art . . . is not only to bring diverse elements together . . . Art must not only be good, it must be conditioned by the needs of the people . . . Art in an absolute sense, as liberal Democracy knows it, has no right to exist." Thus Goebbels has disavowed 'formalist' art, indicated art must bring together 'diverse elements' (with no mention of unifying them) and suggested it must be vernacular: a model postmodernist, except for the word 'good.' (Shortly after Goebbels ruins his postmodernist credentials by decrying elements which are "rootless and destructive, levelling and disintegrating in tendency. . . .")

McClary's Afterword to Attali's *Noise* espouses many postmodern positions. She insists on the need for individuals to create their own music, and favors improvisation, performance art, live multi-media performance, New Wave, minimalism, and neotonality. What is most striking is her echo of Adorno on Schoenberg when she warns grass-roots rock groups not to allow their protests to be "consumed as 'style'," and "absorbed by the recording industry."

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In retrospect it becomes clear that Adorno, who presumably would have hated postmodern music as he hated jazz and all popular music, accounted for Schoenberg in essentially postmodern terms: "These works [the Fourth Quartet and the Violin Concerto] are magnificent in their failure. It is not the composer who fails in the work; history, rather, denies the work in itself." "Music has critically invalidated the idea of the polished work." "In no way does [Schoenberg's music] present an organic totality." Adorno explicitly sees Schoenberg's work as protest: "This art alone designs a picture of total repression, but, by no means, the ideology thereof. By presenting the unreconciled picture of reality, it becomes incommensurable with this reality." Now I have little use for much of what Adorno says about Schoenberg, and I doubt that Adorno}s account of Schoenberg can rehabilitate him as a postmodernist. But for leftists, one of the two essential strands of postmodernism is Adorno's combination of the unfinished work and of protest that cannot be absorbed by the culture industry. The other utopian strand of postmodernism, associated with Ernst Bloch, should be not confused with the negative utopia of Adorno:

> The hermetic work of art belongs to the bourgeois, the mechanical work of art belongs to fascism, and the fragmentary work of art, in its state of complete negativity, belongs to utopia.

By 'hermetic' Adorno means 'autonomous,' not 'rebarbative': this is the absolute music of traditional German aesthetics. Mechanical music would include Stravinsky and jazz, while Adorno's 'utopia' is merely another formulation of Schoenberg's 'fragmentary' protest. Bloch's utopian residue, on the contrary, envisions music which, in addition to representing the ideology of its own time, provides an image of a future utopian society. Like Adorno's negative utopia (implicit in the refusal to accept current reality), Bloch's positive vision of utopia can be explicitly linked to Schoenberg. Here is Bloch on Schoenberg's atonality:

> What this engenders is a kind of unending harmony which no longer needs to communicate the country of origin and destination every time, and which has even less need to shrink from journeys of discovery in the broad spaces of the tonal vacuum.

Even the term postmodernism reveals its connections with utopia, with the communist community after the melting away of the dictatorship of the proletariat, and with the 'end of history.' Like modernism, postmodernism attempts to use a view of history to compel assent.

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Modernism used its claim to historical inevitability so successfully that, despite Sibelius, Richard Strauss, Ravel, Gershwin, Weill, Copland, Puccini, Britten, and many other fine conservative composers, most listeners associate the first seventy years of our century with modernism. Similarly, postmodernism projects itself as the final destination of history and the beginning of the eternal present. If we don't like to examine this ploy very closely, it is because its failure would suggest the possibility of a *third* modernist period (the second began in the 1950s). In that case the term 'postmodernism' would have been as absurd as calling the 1815 restoration of the monarchy in France 'postrevolutionary' (with 1830, 1848, and 1871 still to come).

The attempt of writers on the left to appropriate postmodernism is fraught with contradictions between postmodernism as protest and postmodernism as utopia. Both versions appear hostile to modernism. Yet I see no reason why postmodernism as protest cannot dialogically incorporate the voice of modernism, interpreted as the anguished cry of the exploited and dispossessed. 'Academic' modernism (those who think, as Webern did, that major sevenths can be beautiful and consonant) is the inevitable enemy of postmodernism as protest: it raises the unthinkable specter of a new form of beauty which would (at least at first) exclude most listeners and, even worse, permit the return of autonomous art. But the music of Babbitt, for example, surely represents a kind of utopia (*pace*, Adorno). There is also an abundant body of modernist music which could be understood as dialogically confronting protest and utopia. It is excluded from leftist versions of postmodern not because it couldn't logically find a function there, but because there is no political advantage to including it.

But if the left excludes modernism from its versions of postmodernism for reasons of expediency, its opportunism does not stop there. Its attempt to assimilate elements of postmodernism with which it can and should have nothing in common is, at the least, deplorable. For the attitude of most 'neotonal' or neoromantic music towards the past is (in the words of Rachel Hadas), "nostalgic, parasitic, and cynical": it's as crass as allowing the Bill of Rights to be commercially sponsored by Philip Morris. Those composers who are willing to provide the music market with what it wants have found the 1980s a time of unlimited opportunity. This is especially true of the high-flying insider traders sponsored by Exxon as musical advisors to American orchestras. No matter what kind of music they wrote before, they almost inevitably end up writing the kinds of music star conductors think their audiences can tolerate; and inevitably they have the most to gain from recommending the works of other Exxon composers for performance by 'their' orchestras. Some of this music is very good; but in the present discussion,

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that's irrelevant. If the left wants to promote a Marxist culture, it cannot simply promote whatever's out there, excluding only modernism and the most commercialized pop music.

Similar problems arise with regard to minimalism. It is almost devoid of any possible dialogical elements; indeed, it is even more claustrophobic in this respect than most 'academic' modernism. Minimalism's surface is usually highly polished, affectless, even glitzy: hardly the stuff of protest. It creates a sense of community, but more often provides that community with a narcotic than a stimulant. In some ways minimalism seems less like other postmodern music than like a return to Stravinsky as understood by Boulander. Its production, even when improvised, is relentlessly mechanical, as is its effect: Adorno would call this fascist. I would instead associate the eternal present of minimalism with an ersatz yuppy-utopia, whose perfection consists only of being ruined by attempts to complicate it.

It appears that I have fallen into the trap set for me by those who want to consider music in social and political terms, 'not as art': I too am simply projecting the music I don't much like onto the social and political tendencies I deplore. However, my purpose is simply to indicate some of the obstacles to Marxist appropriation of postmodern music, as well as to deny that the ultimate value of any music depends on *any* interpretation of its social or political message.

The crucial difference between postmodern appropriation of past or non-Western styles, and, for example, Bach's dialogical use of a variety of different musics is that Bach tried to create a finished artistic whole. A much more appropriate role model for postmodernism would be Bach's famous son, C. P. E. Bach – or even his remote descendant, P. D. Q. Bach. For C. P. E. Bach, unlucky in falling between two periods whose methods and goals seemed at first to be utterly incompatible, often leaves musical and stylistic conflicts completely unresolved. Just as C. P. E. Bach was shortly followed by Haydn and Mozart (great masters of more finished but still dialogically rich music), composers may not long be satisfied with either retreating into the arid utopia of minimalism or throwing together different styles indiscriminately. I have recently been encountering the term 'post-postmodernism.' Perhaps this will be a time when composers will once again count on the *listener* to bring chaos into even the most complete and perfect work.

But that time has not yet come, and there are more powerful forces than Marxist criticism working against it. One effect of the commercial ubiquity of music (muzak, film music, music to exercise to) is that we easily accept the most remarkable (modernist) breaks of musical continuity (as of logic in political discourse) as normal. In at least this respect, postmodern music is the outgrowth, not the antithesis, of

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modernism. Even I no longer hesitate to turn off the radio in the middle of a piece: this is one way to make even the most "autonomous" work dialogic and contingent. As long as the musical snippets we separate (or are presented to us separately) are tonal or vernacular, we are happy: this is postmodernism. If the snippets were atonal, dissonant, etc., we would regard *them* as modernist. But by disconnecting snippets, *regardless* of what they themselves are like, we are doing what is appropriate to our image of modernism, in which no event appears to imply any particular (or even any) continuation. Musical postmodernism, therefore, is modernism turned into a virus capable of attacking the music of the past. For some, this is utopia.

Coming in

Partisan Review

- **Czeslaw Milosz:** *On Nationalism* and *Reality*
- **Tatyana Tolstoya:** Fiction
- **Doris Lessing:** On Feminism
- **Alfred Kazin:** On *Howards End*
- **Anatole Broyard:** A Memoir
- **Pearl K. Bell:** Fiction Chronicle
- **Elizabeth Dalton:** On Henry James
- **George Stade:** On Lionel Trilling

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HEATHER MACDONALD

On Peter Sellars

Peter Sellars's detractors and supporters agree on one thing: his modern stagings of classical operas constitute a powerful assault on performance tradition. His most infamous productions to date – Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, *Le Nozze di Figaro*, and *Cosi Fan Tutte*, set respectively in Spanish Harlem, a penthouse suite in Trump Tower, and a Long Island seaside diner, and shown last season on PBS's Great Performance series – have set off howls of treason in the musical establishment.

The view of Sellars as raging iconoclast, however, misses the paradox of his seemingly revolutionary stagings: they grow out of a philosophy of art that is positively old-fashioned. To translate an eighteenth century opera into a twentieth century setting signifies a radical commitment to the work's universality – a concept currently as politically incorrect as that of aesthetic quality. Every decision to stage a work of theater begins in the perception that the work speaks to a contemporary audience. Sellars takes that perception one step further: Not only do Mozart's operas still speak *to* us today, they speak *of* us as well. No mere "dead white male," Mozart is a contemporary, and Don Giovanni and Figaro ourselves.

Sellars's commitment to the continuing relevance of "canonical" works of art set him at odds with his colleagues in the avant-garde establishment. The reigning orthodoxy in the academy and the arts regards any claim of "universality" as a thinly-disguised tool of oppression. That orthodoxy would reject the commonality between Mozart's concerns and the modern world presupposed by Sellars's stagings. In the place of universality now stands "difference." The politics of difference splinters the cultural universe into a congeries check of different voices determined by the speaker's race, gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. Art does not transcend these differences, it merely reproduces them. Once the race, gender, and ethnic identity of an artist is known, there is little reason to study his or her work further. Carried to its logical extreme, the politics of difference dictates that we speak only to ourselves, because every other person is separated from us by some insuperable genetic difference.

The problem with Sellars's productions is rather that they do not pay *enough* attention to difference. If art is about certain timeless problems, it is also inevitably about a particular time and place. Deeply marked as it must be by its milieu and by the perceptions of its creator, it

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is our best repository of the past. It preserves different ways of constructing the world and different possibilities for being human.

In erasing everything specific to the original settings of Mozart's operas, Sellars destroys a window into the eighteenth century. While Mozart's music transcends its time, it also perfectly expresses the ideals of its age. One can tell from his music alone that it is an age not yet afraid to use such terms as "greatness" and "beauty" outside of scare quotes. If no other historical evidence remained for the decorum of the court, it could be induced from the music's balance and poise. But Mozart presents majesty and nobility as attributes not of a particular social class but of the human spirit. Not only do servants such as Barbarina voice their feelings in melody that could ravish a God, but the listener, too, takes on, and is transformed by, the music's power, like Leda swept up by the Swan.

Even as the music embodies the universal ideal of nobility, however, the da Ponte operas explore its far less glorious reality. *Don Giovanni* and *Figaro* in particular are rooted in Mozart's contemporary world. Their plots are driven by the interplay between desire and the rules of class. The relations between the characters could not exist outside the web of those rules. Unlike the dispassionate rulers and lords of opera seria, da Ponte's leading noblemen exploit their aristocratic privilege in the pursuit of sexual dominance.

Sellars's productions violate both the reality and the idea of nobility expressed by Mozart's operas. You cannot take characters whose relations are based on strict social hierarchy, move them to a democratic society, and expect that their behavior will continue to make sense. When Sellars is unable to find a contemporary analogue for a plot device, he simply cuts it from the opera. Rather than rethinking *his* project in the face of obstacles to dramatic translation, he rethinks Mozart's. Sellars was apparently stymied by the "droit du seigneur" in *Figaro*, for instance, and so made do without it. As a result, the plot – a minor detail – was left unmotivated, and the finer comic moments, such as the peasants' song of praise to the Count, *Giovani Liete*, were lost completely. Likewise, moving *Don Giovanni* to the ghetto completely undermines the plot. Don Giovanni's power over the other characters is based in large part on his social rank; it cannot be explained, as it must in a modern setting, wholly in terms of charisma.

The most jarring aspect of Sellars's Mozart, however, is not the damage done to plot and character, but rather the betrayal of the spirit of the music. Mozart is too splendid to belong in an age distracted by shopping malls and video games. But Sellars seems to choose images that deliberately heighten the incongruity. Where the music speaks of grace and politesse, he shows us crudeness and despair. He breaks apart opera's

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unity of sound and sense. The result is an acute dissonance between what the ear hears and what the eye sees.

Things look ominous from the very beginning of the video version of *Figaro*. Sellars accompanies the swelling brilliance of the overture with footage of Christmas shoppers scurrying along Fifth Avenue and Fifty-seventh Street freighted with designer shopping bags. The one sentiment this glorious musical torrent definitely does not convey is the injunction to "shop until you drop."

The defining moment in *Figaro*, however, occurs in Cherubino's first aria, *Non So Piu Cosa Son*. Susan Larson, in oversized hockey jersey, shoulder pads, low-slung jeans, and high tops, delivers the aria on her stomach from Figaro's rumpled sofa-bed. Singing from a prone position is quasi-trademark of collaborations between Sellars and the other *enfant terrible* of the avant-garde – the choreographer, Mark Morris. This time, however, the gesture contains a new element: Larson accompanies herself by humping rhythmically like a neurotic poodle.

The moment is one of utter horror. No gesture could be more inimical to the spirit of the aria than this crude sexual dumbshow. Had Cherubino felt free to hump in public, he would not "speak of love" at all, or if he did, it would be in the violent monosyllables of Luther Campbell, not in the pastoral imagery of Petrarch.

Sellars clearly intended to "demystify" the aria by exposing the animal lust that lurks beneath Cherubino's breathless invocation of "water, shadows, and mountains." Besides insulting the intelligence of the audience, such a purpose misses the point entirely. The demystifying impulse regards convention and formal control as defenses against eroticism. But the formality, the precarious equipoise between passion and decorum, in 18th century music are the source of its erotic tension. Mozart's operas fairly explode with the power they barely constrain. Likewise, the code of courtly manners intensifies the erotic power of the most subtle gesture, by checking the body in the expression of desire.

Sellars's locker-room staging of *Non So Piu* was deaf to both the musical and literary imperatives of the aria. Not only do the rushing cascades of notes suggest a still innocent confusion and an emotional anticipation wholly at odds with the rutting behavior of Sellars's Cherubino, but the aria, itself written, is as much about the rhetorical conventions of love as about its hormonal underpinnings. Cherubino is moved by *words* of love, and responds as any good pastoral poet must: with more words, addressed to "flowers, grass, and fountains."

The effect of Sellars's dissonant stagings is often surreal. During the ballet in the double wedding scene, for example, the dancers writhe to a silent rock beat, while the orchestra performs a stately march.

Don Giovanni is Sellars's one unmitigated disaster. The world of

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Trump Tower, where his *Figaro* is set, while lacking the feudal class rules and the refinement of Count Almaviva's castle, at least does contain extreme differences of power – purchasing and otherwise – on which some of *Figaro*'s story can indeed be hung. The American ghetto, on the other hand, is so much the antithesis of Don Giovanni's Seville, and Sellars's Don Giovanni the antithesis of Mozart's, that the production seems just plain perverse. It is also a torture to watch. Sellars drags music of such terrifying majesty into the gutter. His Don Giovanni can achieve that character's overwhelming power only by mainlining heroin or sniffing cocaine; when not high he slips into a morose and sullen listlessness. He is a boor as well as a depressive. His amusements include deliberately spitting out a "Big Mac," squeezing ketchup on the masticated remains, and offering the mess to Leporello, as well as throwing his french fries at Donna Elvira.

Sellars cannot possibly believe that he has created images in *Don Giovanni* that complement the music; his intentions must be ironic. But the direction of his irony is altogether inscrutable. It is impossible to determine whether he intends to unmask the eighteenth century ideal of nobility, or to decry how far our world has fallen from it.

Cosi Fan Tutte, by contrast, nearly redeems Sellars's approach. Because the battle between the sexes is not dependent on the contemporary class structure, the opera makes the transition to the twentieth century almost gracefully. While arguably the vibrancy and humor of the production simply reflect good direction, Sellars may feel that the modern setting allows a greater scope for zaniness.

The production foregrounds Sellars's greatest strength: his ability to elicit from his ensemble performances of an emotional intensity unparalleled in opera today. Sellars thinks through every emotional detail of an opera. When, as a member of the theater audience, one is issued one of his massive handouts retelling each scene according to his own quixotic interpretation, one wonders whether perhaps he *overthinks* the details. In *Cosi*, however, such directorial intervention pays off. The characters are bound to each other by forces of attraction and repulsion stronger than any physical force.

The most questionable aspect of the production is not its modern setting per se, but rather the decidedly modern angst that hangs over it, as over all the operas in Sellars's da Ponte cycle. By the second act, the characters seem to have passed beyond the diner, with its spiffy banquettes and chrome bar, into the oppressive world of an Edvard Munch painting. Their life has become unbearable, Mozart's regenerative music notwithstanding.

Modernizing older works suppresses the frightening possibility that maybe we can no longer understand the past, and are thus all alone,

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forced to figure out our world for ourselves. In defense against that possibility, modernizing turns ancestors who might otherwise appear somewhat cagey and aloof into the most avuncular of kin, dispensing advice from around the kitchen table. Handel and Aristophanes had *us* in mind all along; they worried about *our* race problems, *our* imperialism problems, *our* class problems, and are ready to give us a hand out of those problems. We don't need to try to enter their world, for they already inhabit ours. Underneath their powdered wigs and doublets, the ancients are moderns just like us: when Shakespeare wrote ghosts, he didn't really mean ghosts, he meant the return of the repressed.

The impulse to modernize is not confined to stage directors. Current teaching in the humanities violently updates the past. Deconstruction and poststructuralism wrench works of literature and philosophy from their original context and force them to speak in the language of critical theory. All past works become harbingers of the deconstructive gospel. Plato was not really interested in the nature of truth and reality but was instead developing a theory of writing that foreshadows Jacques Derrida's. Wordsworth was too deconstructively sophisticated to concern himself with "Nature" and the "human soul"; instead he shared Paul de Man's obsession with muteness and absence.

Uncovering such modern academic concerns in the past serves two functions. It provides today's theories with an august pedigree. And it obviates the unpleasant task of learning history. You don't need any cumbersome luggage to study literature and philosophy, you don't even need to pack your toothbrush, because the ancients are coming to visit you!

Scholarly updating has more serious consequences than theatrical updating. The artistic world values novelty, insuring that for every Orpheus playing an electric guitar, there will be three others with a lyre, and one not singing on stage at all. While any given production may cause us to see that work in a different light, its impact will be mitigated by other productions. (For that reason, the apocalyptic cries that have greeted Sellars's work seem a touch overwrought.) The academic world, on the other hand, rewards conformity. Every assistant professor is trying to churn out as many articles as possible mimicking the official line on "textuality." That official line imposes conformity on the past as well. It does not recognise ideas that have no value to present theory. As a result, students receive a monolithic and exceedingly narrow exposure to our culture's great expressions of thought, an exposure that reduces most large ideas to the random play of tropes. And since most students will never pick up a book not on the bestseller list once they graduate, that exposure will be their last.

We are all modernizers. Any act of interpretation necessarily brings

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a past work into the present, and places it in the context of the interpreter's experience. But only a solipsist or a paranoiac really believes that all utterances refer to himself. That belief not only distorts meaning, it also deprives the person holding it of knowledge about the world outside of himself. Mozart is at best a distorted mirror of the present. He speaks much more clearly about his own era.

While the concept of "period production" is far more problematic than any of Sellars's critics, in their rage, have acknowledged, at its core is the effort to bring forth from a work that which is specific to its time. Whether that realization occurs on a bare stage or in an elaborately appointed boudoir is less important than the intention behind it. The late Jean-Pierre Ponnelle's productions of Monteverdi and Mozart were far from literal recreations of Baroque palaces or of contemporary theater sets, and they used movements at times more explicitly erotic than anything Sellars has essayed. Yet they captured the passion and the artifice of the Baroque sensibility with a rare brilliance.

The barriers to understanding the past have been rehearsed ad nauseum by modern philosophers of language. But just because we will never perfectly capture Mozart's intentions or produce the definitive *Don Giovanni* does not mean that the effort to do so is a worthless one. Our desire to transcend the self in search of the other makes us human. This humanist search for understanding is a far cry from the multiculturalist cult of "difference," which ultimately uses difference as a wedge to drive people apart. It also leads in a different direction from Sellars's attempts to turn Mozart into a critic of late twentieth century society.

Though Sellars wants to show the continuity between Mozart's world and ours, his productions constantly remind us of how different those two worlds really are. Whatever Sellars may have gained by hijacking Mozart into the twentieth century was far outweighed by what was lost. What was lost was the opportunity to imagine our way into the past, into a world in whose ideals we have lost faith.

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RACHEL HADAS

Visiting Schools

It's a good thing my husband and I can read each other's glances. One eyeflick is enough. A wink would be hard to manage under these circumstances, but no wink is required; the first flash of mutuality says it all, and one of the things it says is that this school won't do. That we might well go home, now, at nine in the morning, and save ourselves a day. Nevertheless, such are the moral pressures associated with looking at schools for one's child that we decide (still in a wordless eyeslant) to go through with it. Oh do not ask what is it;/ Let us go and make our visit.

Here we go. This school boasts, to start with, that it has no walls. Classrooms are separated from one another by more subtle structures that when necessary do double duty as walls – blackboards, say, or shelves ("or urinals," George accurately whispers). This wall-lessness is what I remember best, but there must be other things too. Let's see. Well, when our silent group of prospective parents was still drinking coffee in an office, the hot-eyed Head said something like this to us: "Present knowledge will be outdated in five years, so obviously the important thing is process. Traditional schools put too much emphasis on individuation. Here we cluster."

Cluster. Bees, hives, swarms, a whole Virgilian pastoral swiftly deploys itself as our docile flock follows the guide upstairs. But what's before us resembles a bare loft, or maybe a pseudo-cave – anyway, it is space that's been deliberately undifferentiated. The effect manages to be unfinished and cluttered at the same time. Sparse furnishings leave more room for an accumulation of detritus. Human habitation has (as how could it fail to?) created zones. But zones seem to go against the ideological grain of this place. God forbid the individual self, that poor pariah, should possess a refuge to which to retreat and slam the door behind it. For greater tribal unity, the slogan here would seem to go Whitman one better. "Unscrew the doors from their jambs!" he cries in *Song of Myself*. But once the walls have come down, there's no need, no place for doors anyway.

I wonder if clustering comes more naturally after one has been pent up long enough in the cell of the self, or whether having known privacy makes it harder to adjust to the lack of it. The wall-lessness here seems to carry a double message. First, partitions are not and never were necessary: welcome to a world without walls! And then the shadow subtext: even

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if you were used to walls, or thought you were, learn to do without them now.

Since our son starts kindergarten next fall, we've already visited a couple of schools this December. Both featured brands of cant that struck me as milder than this wall-less business – not that they aren't also doomed, dishonest, at the very least depressing. A teacher in a Gifted and Talented program mimes excitement at the sight of eggs hatching, of cocoons on twigs – projects the class may well be following with an awe the teacher may or may not truly feel. Let me give this woman the benefit of the doubt: she probably is galvanized by the processes it may be both her vocation and avocation to demonstrate. What disconcerts me is the way it seems obligatory that she mime a rapt response (the children's? hers?) to prospective parents. I sense an unspoken imperative – not merely not spoken out loud but not even silently formulated in words. Nevertheless, it's in the air, and it goes something like this: *Impersonate for visitors the childlike gifts of exuberance, concentration, innocent wonder.*

A liverish thought, too early in the morning of our visit to this Gifted and Talented group: it's shabby the way we grownups simultaneously (or is it successively) stimulate, take the credit for, and ape a child's perceptions. But isn't it something that we've been guilty of at least since the Romantics? Looking around, I see that some of the parents opt to mimic amazement back at the teacher (in a strange way she thereby becomes for the moment their teacher). Thus a mutual mirror is set up, which excludes eggs, cocoons, terraria, and certainly children. Other parents are simply silent – stolid or sleepy or just beyond amazement.

I'm among those who cannot jack open their eyes far enough at this hour, in this classroom. Not that nature's not amazing. I'm not in kindergarten, and for me reading and thinking precede and foster the sense of wonder – a sense which I experience more as an occasional achievement than a course requirement. Careening between subatomic particles and a galaxy-looped universe where space curves like a girdle laced with time, the choice of focus confronting us would seem to be macro or micro, not whether to cluster while we pulse in our cosmic minim.

Still dutifully touring the sprawling school without walls, chewing the cud of how to group the educable young, I realize with a spurt of irritation that whether or not it's a good thing to do, of course people cluster. Walls, that invention maligned here, both result from and enhance our instinct to go into a huddle. Unhesitatingly we form little groups that foster warmth and language, social roles, families, exclusion, territory, war. Shrinking with trepidation, some maverick does

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occasionally emerge, pick up a seashell, marvel at an egg. But boundaries, our condition, come of clusters and cannot be magically or surgically separated from them. It makes no sense to hope, as this school's philosophers seem to, that denying walls will generate clusters. We people are ineluctably enmeshed in both. The marks of reticulation are slow to fade; why dignify the process of erasure?

I bet schools in the Stone Age, ancient cutting edges of the new, prided themselves on the avant-garde feature of walls. Shamans, artists of the new, slung up skins to separate the mage from the clan. A side-effect of such moveable partitions was the fostering of divisions that sheltered the infant notion of a separate self.

Back in the Bronze Age, when I was in sixth grade, certain pages of my history textbook featured inset boxes printed in bright red to emphasize each important step in human progress. What comes to mind must have been the first example in the book. GOOD IDEA: FIRE! the box announced. And where there is fire, one might conjecture, a roof and walls eventually follow.

The textbook couldn't include a story told by Primo Levi in *The Drowned and the Saved*, a book that had not yet been written in 1958. But what Levi is describing took place not in some primeval period but only a few years before I was born. He tells how his fellow prisoners in the convoy to Auschwitz improvised a kind of screen in the corner of the freight car. With a nail, a string, and a blanket, they contrived to provide a modicum of privacy for each user of the infant's chamber pot that one woman had happened to bring along for her doomed toddler.

How would my textbook have glossed this instinctive gesture of modesty, of *amour propre*? GOOD IDEA: DECENCY – even (a footnote might add) on the road to one's extinction.

While we make walls we are human. What is the Head saying now that we are back in her quarters? "Teachers here are always called only by their first names." The silence that greets this remark is hard to interpret. First names are endemic across the country, so this policy is hardly news. Whereupon a second thought scuttles past: many a murderer calls his victims *tu*.

Again I have that shadow sense of a sweating mimic practising in front of a mirror. That casual gestures actually evoke the intimacy they mimic; that only cramming minds into clusters can create a nest for an idea – it's easier and more pleasant to believe these things than to acknowledge the inextricable snarls that set us yearning, yes, for the public amidst the private but also vice versa. Stifled and groping through a grove of totems, flicking through boundaries of slung blankets for air, as who should shove her way through steaming swamps of drying sheets so hung as to hide the horizon, the child does finally break free of walls,

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to feel at once desolate and lost.

We are designed for pain. It's not a welcome notion in this precinct, but it's something I believe, that beauty is what we absently gaze at, having first taken care to shut our thoughts' green door on the clustered committee in session. And now I realize that within the walls, or rather the nonwalls, of this school (Learning Center, I think it calls itself), human achievement comes as a surprise. Not a surprise drenched with delicious awe, but a dreary stirring of wonder that we could ever have managed to accomplish so much.

Quaint and irrelevant – whatever it is, it has all been done. From Chartres to quarks, structures and discoveries lie behind us – or not so much behind us as in limbo, flashed on a screen for instant reference, but not anything that concerns us. Picturesque, irrelevant, imposing, beautiful – the words we might come up with hardly matter. Maybe that's the point: that there is no proper response. Curtseying to the world, and yawning, the children assimilate the artifact and move on to the next inscrutable subject. Rather, they do not move on; it is trundled in to them.

Hasn't the Head told us that since all knowledge is becoming outdated even as we speak, we have to learn the principle of action, not the minutiae of the product? Squeezed among their fellows in the kinds of knots people form in too-large spaces, often sitting on the floor because someone thinks chairs are retrograde, how tired these children look – though not quite so tired as their teachers or, presumably, we sober, still silent pack of parents. I haven't needed to look at my husband again. I am suddenly so exhausted I want to renounce the world of effort and hope, and sit down against a wall in some green place where a Ptolemaic sun sails across a sky all but close enough for me to touch.

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RAY CARNEY

Looking without Seeing

The subtitle of *Allegories of Cinema: American Film in the Sixties* is so misleading that one assumes it was added by an editor attempting to cash in on the nostalgia of the baby-boom generation. *Allegories of Cinema* is assuredly not about "American Film in the Sixties," and a reader expecting discussions of *Dr. Strangelove*, *West-Side Story*, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, or *The Graduate*, will be in for a surprise. These classic sixties pictures, and scores of others, are not even mentioned. Nor is the author, David E. James, interested in cinematically characterizing the ten-year period glibly referred to as "the sixties." He understands that calendar dates almost never coincide with actual historical epochs or artistic movements. James intends to give a reader something far more fascinating than his talk-show subtitle suggests. His aim is to provide "a thorough account of the growth, development, and decay of non-studio film practices in the United States between the late nineteen-fifties and the mid-seventies." In those years, American art film was born. While Hollywood continued to churn out one commercial confection after another, a small group of American artists, working alone and outside of the system, redefined film's expressive possibilities. Financing their work out of their own pockets and utilizing equipment which became available and affordable only in the late fifties and early sixties, they pursued a vision of film not as big-budget, mass-produced mass-entertainment, but as uncompromised artistic expression.

Yet it is one of the continuing disgraces of film studies that, even at this late date, the story of independent filmmaking remains an unwritten chapter in American film history. It is a movement whose work is still almost completely unknown to the average (or even the considerably above-average) filmgoer. That may seem too strong; but how many of the following films are screened and discussed even in university courses? (I deliberately exclude nonfiction films from the tally, and I artificially limit the list to works created within the twenty-year period of James's survey.): Barbara Loden's *Wanda*; Mark Rappaport's *Casual Relations*, *Mozart in Love*, *Local Color*, *Scenic Route*, and *Impostors*; John Korty's *Crazy Quilt*, *Riverrun*, and *Funnyman*; Paul Morrissey's *Lonesome Cowboys*, *Blue Movie*, *Flesh*, *Trash*, *Heat*, and *L'Amour*; Lionel Rogosin's *On the Bowery* and *Come Back Africa*; Kenneth Anger's *Magic Lantern Cycle*, John Cassavetes's *Shadows*, *Faces*, *Husbands*, *Minnie and Moskowitz*, *A Woman*

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under the Influence, *The Killing of a Chinese Bookie*, and *Opening Night*; Milton Moses Ginsberg's *Coming Apart*; Robert Kramer's *Ice* and *Milestones*; Elaine May's *Mikey and Nicky*; Michael Roemer's *Nothing But a Man* and *The Plot Against Harry*; Shirley Clarke's *Bridges Go Round* and *Portrait of Jason*; Morris Engel's *The Little Fugitive*; James Ivory's *Shakespeare Wallah*, *Bombay Talkie*, *Autobiography of a Princess*, and *Roseland*; Bruce Connor's *A Movie* and *Report*.

These are the obvious, seminal masterworks of American film art from the late fifties through the seventies. Yet how frequently do you hear any of them mentioned in dinner-table conversation? How many of them are alluded to as touchstones of excellence in the review columns even of high-toned magazines and newspapers like *The New Yorker* or *The New York Times*? I rarely meet professors of film who have seen more than three or four of these works. These works and others define an authentic "great tradition" in American film, but, given the terrifying economics of film distribution and promotion, it is probably not surprising that it remains a lost tradition. The journalistic situation is especially discouraging for alternative work. A review is almost the only way for these films to become known to the general public, yet it's as if television, radio, and the print media have become extensions of the studio PR machine. The Hollywood publicists fill up all of the available journalistic space with their press kits and news releases.

What's at stake is more than a matter of column-inches. The studios dictate the definition of film itself, so that there is no imaginative space left for alternatives to Hollywood. That's why the general level of discussion of jazz, opera, bridge, or chess (or practically any other area of human expression, including sports) is more sophisticated than what passes for film coverage in the media. At least in the chess or bridge column of the paper there isn't such a pattern of systematically excluding acts of genius from consideration. On any day of the week, in the music programming on your local FM station, you can hear the historical performances of Billie Holiday or Louis Armstrong; their achievements aren't simply written out of the official histories of their art, as the performances of these filmmakers are.

Even American film scholarship has allowed its agendas to be set by Hollywood (which is why the vast majority of so-called serious film critics write about the same movies as those covered in *Time*, *Newsweek*, or *People*). When American film scholars look for "art," they don't look at home; they look abroad – to French, German, and Italian film. The most unfortunate consequence is that American independent filmmakers have been denied their own history. Most of those with whom I have spoken didn't even know there was anyone else in America other than

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themselves attempting to shape an alternative to pop-culture forms of mass-entertainment. Like the film professors many of them took courses with, they looked not to America but to Europe for sustaining examples of a tradition of art cinema. To add insult to injury and to confuse the issue completely, in the course of the 1970s, even the title of "independent" was taken away from these filmmakers. Mass-market reviewers like Pauline Kael, Rex Reed, Gene Shallit, and Vincent Canby popularized the application of the term to the studio-based work of directors like Spielberg, Coppola, De Palma, and Lucas. Commercial movies like *Bonnie and Clyde*, *Easy Rider*, *Mash*, *Midnight Cowboy*, and *The Godfather* were championed as marking the expressive limits of the art form (when, in fact, all they defined were the calculations of the commercial imagination). The real independents were left without even a flag to rally around.

Given this context, a reader can imagine my state of expectation as I picked up James's volume – described on its dust-jacket as the first comprehensive, critical history of this great, neglected movement. But I am sorry to report that I turned the pages with an increasingly sinking heart. Though James mentions some of the works on my list and discusses a few (though far too few) of them, there are a number of fatally disabling shortcomings in his approach and only one genuine strength. To give the good news before the bad, the strong point of *Allegories of Cinema* is that James analyzes a number of the social, intellectual, and political hidden agendas that the diverse aesthetic practices in the independent movement subserved (usually unknown to the artists themselves). This is an extremely valuable corrective to the weightless formalism and uncritical promotionalism of the few previous, and much less substantial, treatments of the movement – specifically to the work of P. Adams Sitney in *Visionary Film*.

Sitney's book is clearly one of the major influences on James's own, but while Sitney cuts film "texts" away from the social and political "contexts" that surround them, and more or less takes filmmakers at their own word about the meaning of their work (in the process, showing himself to be captive to the Shelleyan stances and Blakean pronouncements that he ought to be analyzing), James restores some of the cultural contexts and critical distance necessary for understanding. His finest moments are when he functions as a provider of intellectual backgrounds for analysis. His book is far from flawless even in this regard, however. His writing is jargon-ridden, clichéd, stylistically convoluted, and clotted with fashionable critical buzz words. Like Sitney, James frequently becomes a shameless propagandist and apologist for an amazingly narrow view of artistic expression. (Though his is a slightly different view than Sitney's: James makes no bones about being under the influence of Al-

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thusser, Jameson, and contemporary Marxist theory in general, and he is as blatantly biased in favor of certain forms of cinematic *agitprop*, as Sitney, the Pateresque Romantic, is indifferent to politics.)

One might be able to overlook these shortcomings if James were content to function as a social and intellectual historian (and were willing to confine himself to the value-neutral comparative procedures of such writing). But the problem is that James fancies himself a critic, an analyst of works of art, and in the course of *Allegories of Cinema* confidently issues a series of grand, Olympian critical pronouncements and interpretations. That's where one's real reservations begin. As a critic James can be called only embarrassing. He is clearly unqualified for the part, almost completely lacking in ability to tell good work from bad, originality from derivativeness, complexity from superficiality. James's idea of criticism is to subject a film to a series of purity tests for "politically correct" values, searching for (and, needless to say, where he needs to, always finding) ideological "contradictions," "tensions," "fractures," "inconsistencies," or "equivocations" to demolish films he doesn't like. In one of the more egregious instances, John Cassavetes's delicate, tentative, semicomic *Shadows* is judged to be, by turns, manipulative, deceptive, prevaricating, fraudulent, and (in the key phrase that sums everything up) "politically equivocating," more or less entirely on the basis of the fact that a white actress was cast to play the part of a light-skinned black woman (who passes for white in the story). For the flat-minded James, that represents an act of political cowardice and a damning indictment of the work.

Of course, the issue is not whether we like or dislike a particular film. What gives one pause is the adequacy of political loyalty tests as ways of grading works of art. What James's writing (and most other ideologically based criticism, unfortunately including most feminist analysis) fails to understand is not only that the greatest art works will never be reducible to schematic political agendas, but that not to be summarizable in such a way is an aspect of their greatness. James occasionally writes about pop culture in film magazines, and his literal-mindedness about ferreting out hidden political significances might work with schlock, but it won't do for something like *Shadows*. Methods of analysis that suffice to dissect "political equivocations" in the evening news aren't adequate to appreciate the expressive subtleties of an art work, precisely because works of art function so much more complexly than Dan Rather's scripts do. James just doesn't understand how works of genius make meanings. He is oblivious to the special ways of knowing that art works induce as alternatives to the very social and economic categories he invokes. He can't appreciate how the greatest works cultivate complex, shifting states of consciousness and awareness that will always defy

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his imposition of crude ideological labels.

In the course of *Allegories of Cinema*, James mentions almost five hundred films and discusses close to a hundred of them in some detail, but his omissions are at least as revealing as his inclusions. He cuts his definition of independent film down to fit his Procrustean critical methods. That is the only explanation I can see for why some of the most stunning works of the independent movement are as completely omitted from his treatment as if they had never existed (Barbara Loden's *Wanda*, Robert Kramer's *Milestones*, and Mark Rappaport's, James Ivory's, and John Korty's entire *oeuvres*), or are written off in a few sentences (much of Paul Morrissey's work and all of Cassavetes's beyond *Shadows*). They are apparently omitted because they are not politically radical enough to merit his attention. On the other hand, works of almost no enduring value are dwelled on for pages, as long as they have their political papers in order. Even discounting its ideological tendentiousness, James's canon of independent work demonstrates a strikingly provincial and limited knowledge of the field. A reader hoping for a fresher and more "independent" view of independent cinema will be disappointed by James's roundup of the usual suspects. More than half of his text is devoted to reciting the same tired litany of films and filmmakers that one encounters in the few previous treatments of the subject. It is the by-now all too predictable list of New York avant-garde work installed in the cinematic pantheon by Sitney almost two decades ago: a small and not terribly fascinating group of filmmakers, most of whom know each other, come from the same geographical area, share similar assumptions about film, and show regularly in the same downtown theaters and uptown museums: Stan Brakhage, Ernie Gehr, Peter Kubelka, Michael Snow, Paul Sharits, Hollis Frampton, and Jack Smith, among others. (The politically fashionable Jean-Luc Godard is predictably dragged in as the prime piece of foreign real estate by which to assess New York values.)

Many of the preceding limitations in James's text can be attributed to his lack of critical sophistication: his naivete about artistic expression allows him to confuse political correctness with acts of genius, and his inability to tell good work from bad forces him to stay on the beaten path where others have already cleared the way for him. But another aspect of his approach is even more disturbing than his critical immaturity. It is his profound bias against all "realistic," "narrative" forms of representation (that is to say: all forms committed to presenting events in a dramatically "transparent" manner, in terms of the personal interactions of characters, by means of a temporally sequential and coherent course of events).

James displays a blithe confidence that realistic, narrative forms of

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expression have been superseded by more "modern" or "advanced" forms. In this, too, he again shows himself a slave to New York fashion. He faddishly follows the expressive check-list of European high modernism (with a dash of postmodernism thrown in to spice up the recipe): Continuity is out, fragmentation is in; characters are out, media-generated voices, masks, and surfaces are in; sequentiality and causality are out, simultaneity and collage are in. And, subsuming and including all of the above: dramatic representation is out, artistic self-referentiality and reflexivity are in. In James's view of art, narrative commitments and dramatic coherence are reactionary and repressive "commercial compromises." Though the logic of this breathtaking assumption is never really explained, its shorthand origin in the mind of the "advanced" film critic apparently originates from the fact that since narrative realism "equals" Hollywood banality, non-narrative self-referentiality "equals" artistic complexity. Or, to put it a slightly different way, since Hollywood is narrative and dramatic, art film must become nonnarrative and reflexive in response, to escape from and comment upon the limitations of "industrial" production. ("The industry" is the way James pejoratively refers to Hollywood throughout his text.)

The fallacy of the equation resides in the hypostatization of "narrative realism" as if it were a fixed quality of a work and not merely a form of which there can be better and worse, stronger and weaker uses. Just because Hollywood films use narrative conventions simplistically doesn't mean that the conventions themselves are simplistic. On the contrary, Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth, and Henry James all emphatically prove otherwise. James's childish faith that since narrative imprisons us, non-narrative will set us free would be touching if it weren't so widely shared by other "cutting edge" film scholars (most notably those in the Burch and Bordwell camps). His very task as an historian of the flabby fringes of the independent movementsshould have been to flush out such formal fatuousness – whether practices by critics or by filmmakers – not to buy into it wholesale.

Keeping in mind James's scorn of all manifestations of narrative and dramatic realism is the only way a reader will be able to make sense of many of his more bizarre judgments. Following Sitney in this respect also, James selectively rewrites whole stretches of the history of independent film in order to minimize the importance of narrative work in the story. When he does include a narrative film in his discussion, it is invariably to suggest that its observance of narrative continuities and coherences limits its value because, as he puts it at one point, it "does not investigate alternatives to the conventions of the industrial feature and its received social functions." James patronizes Robert Kramer's assaultive and brilliant *Ice* by labeling it "a fictional entertainment film" (implicitly

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lumping it in with the drivel of Hollywood), because the filmmaker refuses to abrogate the forms of narrative presentation. He damns Michael Roemer's *Nothing But a Man* and Shirley Clarke's *The Cool World* with the faint praise that "their formal limits [reproduce] the limits of their liberal ideology. They strain the industry's narrative and representational codes, but they cannot pass beyond them." (I'm sure I don't have to gloss what "liberal" means to James the neo-Marxist. It's even worse than "narrative.")

In short, James shows himself to be as sophomoric in his understanding of artistic form as he is in his understanding of artistic meaning. He simply cannot appreciate that narrative conventions and realistic forms of expression are not intrinsically simplifying aspects of a work. He cannot understand that, as used by Kramer and Roemer in the examples he cites (and as May, Morrissey, Loden, and others use them in their work), character and plot are ways of chastening and criticizing otherwise unchecked imaginative impulses. Narrative modes of presentation are forms of complication and engagement, not ways of escaping complexity. The use of temporal, causal, and interpersonal forms of presentation is a way of testing and resisting energies to which many non-narrative forms too easily yield. That is why, if there are invidious comparisons to be made, James has the relative complexity of narrative and non-narrative forms reversed. Many of the non-narrative, non-realistic works James extols seem imaginatively self-indulgent, emotionally simplistic, and expressively slack in comparison with the complex realism practiced by Cassavetes, Kramer, and others.

It's a shame that James couldn't rise to the occasion that presented itself. America deserves a chance to rediscover one of its supreme bodies of artistic work. Even more importantly, American independent filmmakers deserve the opportunity to recover their own history and identity. Fortunately, it is a history and identity that is still in the making. Although James suggests that independent filmmaking as a powerful alternative to Hollywood modes of production gradually declined and faded out sometime in the late seventies, a viewer interested in the art of film can give thanks that the independent movement is still going as strong in the nineties as it was in the two decades on which James focuses. There is a whole new generation of independents rewriting our cinematic heritage. But you won't see clips from their films on "Siskel and Ebert," or read about them in the *Times*, and you won't find the movement of which they are a part done justice to in any of the standard film textbooks or scholarly studies. One of the greatest American artistic movements of the postwar period still awaits its historian.

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KAREN WILKIN

Robert Motherwell 1915-1991

Robert Motherwell's death, at the age of seventy-six on July 16th, seemed to mark the end of an era, the end of a time when American abstraction was something new, vigorous, startling, and inspiring to artists everywhere. Motherwell and Willem de Kooning were the last surviving members of the inner circle of Abstract Expressionism, and de Kooning, alas, has been severely debilitated for many years. Motherwell, on the other hand, remained a vigorous presence, painting, drawing, and making prints with much of the elegance and authority that distinguished his work from the very beginning of his career. It's only in the past year or so that his art lost some of its incisiveness and potency – because of his poor health – and nearly half a century's innovation and unflagging pursuit of excellence far outweighs this brief problematic period.

It's hard to decide just what is the most important part of Motherwell's rich legacy. The solemn *Elegies*, with their jostling ovals and bars, are probably his best known images. Originally intended as a tribute to the short-lived Spanish Republic, the image preoccupied Motherwell, off and on, from 1948 until his death. The graphic rows of elemental shapes have been compared to everything from genitalia to the ears and tail of the bull awarded to a triumphant matador at the end of a *corrida*, while the last, tremulous (and, it must be admitted, very tentative) versions of the motif suggest figures pressing together more than anything else. Motherwell's own explanation is less specific:

> I take an elegy to be a funeral lamentation or funeral song for something one cared about. The *Spanish Elegies* are not "political," but my private insistence that a terrible death happened that should not be forgot. They are as eloquent as I could make them. But the pictures are also general metaphors of the contrast between life and death, and their interrelation.

Less familiar than the *Elegies*, the severely geometric *Open* series includes some of Motherwell's most economical and seductive paintings, with their subtle drawn lines and floods of color, from sheets of monochrome to pregnant chiaroscuro swirls. The *Opens* are deceptively simple – variations on an outlined rectangle set against the rectangle of the canvas – but at their best, they suggest infinite space, architecture,

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confronting walls, the history of Cubism, and much more. The image, Motherwell tells us, came from studio happenstance – seeing a small canvas leaning against a larger one – but the image proved seminal. As he described it, he realized that "it was a picture in itself, a lovely painted surface plane, beautifully, if minimally, *divided, which is what drawing is*."

And drawing, of course, is what Motherwell was really about. One of the master draughtsmen of our century, he invented an eloquent personal calligraphy – both fluid diagrams of intense emotional states and testimony to a faultless sense of placement – wordless flourishes, sometimes engulfed by cascading curtains of paint, sometimes floating free. Sensitive as he was to nuances of surface, it may be that his greatest gift was for line. I have written before about my conviction that drawing was primary to Motherwell's work. Color, by his own description, was not a means of structuring a picture, but rather a way of carrying content. "Generally, I use few colors," Motherwell said, "yellow ochre, vermillion, orange, cadmium green, ultramarine blue. Mainly I use each color as simply symbolic: ochre for the earth, green for the grass, blue for the sky and sea. I guess that black and white, which I use most often, tend to be protagonists."

In the collages that Motherwell produced throughout his career, the drawing impulse is translated into edges and, sometimes, into ready made patterns and words. These spare, accomplished pictures are vivid evidence, too, of his life-long Francophilia and delight in anything Mediterranean. They make plain the basis of his art in French modernism, his enthusiasm for French poetry, food, even for the color of French cigarette wrappers. In some ways, the collages offer the clearest image of Motherwell's personality, although, as it turns out, it may not be quite accurate. If we search beyond the evident excellences of structure, the tense accord of disparate parts, and try to read the materials that make up the collage for clues to Motherwell's life, we are liable to be misled.

"Most of the papers I use in my collages are random," he said. "Even the sheet music. In fact, I don't read music. I look at printed music as calligraphy, as beautiful details. I do not smoke Gauloises cigarettes, but that particular blue of the label happens to attract me, so I possess it." Still, he didn't deny that the collages had layers of meaning, at least for him, beyond immediate appearance. "The collages are a kind of private diary, not made with an actual autobiographical intention, but one that functions in an associative way for me . . . For a painter as abstract as myself, the collages offer a way of incorporating bits of the everyday world into pictures. Some of my collages make past years and place in all their concreteness arise in my mind."

Motherwell's images have stamped themselves on our consciousness, but he has left us a second inheritance, as well. In recent years, as a sur-

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vivor, he served as Abstract Expressionism's unofficial spokesman, but even when more of his colleagues were holding forth, he was more articulate (and less longwinded) than, say, Barnett Newman, less peevish than Clyfford Still, more clear-headed and less mystical than Mark Rothko. Motherwell occupied with apparent ease the chair of resident intellectual, writer, and editor. The series of writings by twentieth-century artists and their associates, *Documents of Modern Art* and *Documents of Twentieth-Century Art*, which he helped to edit for the Museum of Modern Art, amounts to an essential archive of modernism. An edition of his own writings has been promised for some time.

Motherwell was also one of the art world's most accomplished *bon vivants*. When I first met him, in the early 1970s, as a rookie curator organizing an exhibition about the influence of the concept of the collective unconscious on abstract painting of the 1940s, he was gracious, generous with his time and his early works, happy to reminisce about the period. In the setting of his lavish Connecticut studio, he projected an aura of great sophistication, cultivation, and an intolerance for less than the best – all a little self-conscious and slightly off-putting. Then he disarmed me by describing his 1940s self: "I had culture with a capital 'K.' " Lunch with Motherwell, his wife, the photographer Renate Ponsold, and another guest, at a fine French restaurant nearby also helped.

Younger than most of his colleagues in the Abstract Expressionist group, Motherwell had a different formation from theirs. He grew up and was educated largely outside of New York, and just as he came to the city relatively late, he came to making art relatively late; he began painting, apparently on the advice of Meyer Schapiro, with whom he was studying at Columbia, only after completing the university education many of his fellow New York School painters lacked. Motherwell was too young to have shared his fellows' experiences as WPA artists. He was too young, also, to have fought in the early battles between supporters of the nationalist realism that Adolph Gottlieb dubbed "The Corn Belt Academy" and advocates of an internationally grounded, formally adventurous modernism, but he was an immediate and life-long champion of internationalism and formal daring. Motherwell was attracted, early on, to Surrealist notions of tapping the unconscious as a source of imagery, the method that André Breton called "pure psychic automatism." Almost from the start, Motherwell's paintings demonstrated his belief in the significance of images released in this way: abstract images that expressed deep emotions in terms of the materials of painting. As he put it:

> You don't have to paint a figure to express human feelings. The game is not what things look like. The game is organizing as accurately and with as deep discrimination as one can, states of feeling, and states

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> of feeling . . . become questions of light, color, weight, solidity, airiness, lyricism, whatever.

Motherwell shared with the artists he called "the core of Abstract Expressionism," painters like Pollock, de Kooning, Newman, Still, Rothko, Gottlieb, and Gorky, and his close friend, the sculptor David Smith, the conviction that the source of all art was to be found not in observed actuality, but in untrammeled inner reality. It made them firm aesthetic allies, despite the differences in their backgrounds and in the appearance of their work. Motherwell's fascination with psychic automatism, his interest in Surrealist theory, and, he maintained, his having "culture with a capital 'K,' " prompted the Surrealists in New York, self-exiled from German-occupied France, to take the young painter's work seriously (as they did Arshile Gorky's), while his friendship with the Chilean Surrealist, Matta, helped to cement the relationship. Yet Motherwell also shared with his fellow New York painters a lack of interest in the look of Surrealist art. His heroes were Cézanne, Picasso, Mondrian, and, especially, Matisse.

Later in his life, he explained these tastes as being inevitable. In a 1979 interview, he said: "My father had a vineyard in the Napa Valley. I grew up in a landscape not at all dissimilar to Provence, or to the central plateau of Spain, or to parts of Italy and the Mediterranean basin . . . A Cézanne or a Matisse painted in Provence looked more natural to me than, say, a picture of a subway in New York."

The real importance of psychic automatism to Motherwell – not discounting the entreé it had provided to the world of European "Artists in Exile" – was that it helped him to generate pictures. He used the method for the rest of his life. In 1964, describing for a psychoanalytic journal his working techniques, Motherwell said: "I usually begin a picture with a 'doodle,' or with a liquid puddle like a Rorschach image (but not pressed together), or with a line and a dot, or a piece of paper dropped at random on what will be a collage. Then the struggle begins, and endures throughout in a state of anxiety that is ineffable, but obliquely recorded in the inner tensions of the finished canvas."

"Struggle" is a recurring theme in Motherwell's statements about art. It's surprising, in light of the apparent spontaneity of his work, but understandable in the context of his generation. For Motherwell and his colleagues, painting was a process of self-discovery and self-revelation; a picture was evidence of that search. For some of the Abstract Expressionists, a "finished" painting appeared to be still in flux, with abundant evidence of previous states and hints at future evolution. Individual works by Motherwell have none of this irresolute quality, but his entire body of work can be read as stating an infinite series of alternatives. It's not just

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that he was obsessed with particular images, themes, or colors; each painting of, say, an *Elegy*, each collage, each work on paper is a rethinking that tests new ways of giving form to constant feelings. Motherwell's own discussion of the process is particularly revealing:

> The reason I've made so many works that could be called series – I detest so-called "serial painting" – is simply because I feel I've never fully resolved any of them. They remain an endless challenge. The day I can make an *Elegy* that fully satisfies me, perhaps then I'll stop that search.

But some searches would continue:

> The mysteries of black are inexhaustible, as are even more those of the human spirit, of which painting is a visible trace.

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BOOKS

The Master and Mrs. Wharton

THE LETTERS OF EDITH WHARTON. Edited by R. W. B. Lewis and Nancy Lewis. Charles Scribner's Sons. $29.95.
HENRY JAMES AND EDITH WHARTON: LETTERS, 1900-1915. Edited by Lyall H. Powers. Charles Scribner's Sons. $29.95.

More than once, during the twelve or so years of their famous friendship, Edith Wharton and Henry James seem to have initially considered, only to end up backing away from, the possibility of writing about each other's work. In April 1910, W. Morton Herton learns from a letter included in the admirable selection by R.W.B. Lewis and Nancy Lewis that Wharton is weighing an invitation to "write an article on him for the Figaro. Don't you think I shld be mad to attempt it?" Whether or not Herton agreed, she apparently thought so, for we hear nothing further on this score until Wharton announces, over a year later, "I have begun my article on Henry" — denoting, it appears, an entirely different assignment, identified by the editors as a piece, never completed and now lost, on the New York Edition. As it turned out, of course, Wharton would publish her principal statements on James only after his death. James, for his part, finds himself "conscious of a lively & spontaneous disposition to really dedicate a few lucid remarks to the mystery of your genius" when he is approached in 1907, for a few words about her latest novel, by an unscrupulous editor claiming to act on Wharton's own initiative. Even after the fraud is exposed, James maintains, "I *want* to enthuse over you, I yearn to, quite – but I must wait for the right and bright and honorable occasion for so doing." Such an occasion wouldn't arise for another several years, his enthusiasm by then largely occluding itself in the tangled phrasing of a single meandering, characteristically tortuous paragraph (on *The Custom of the Country*) halfway through James's important late essay, "The Younger Generation." In such mutual ambivalences and equivocations lies one key, perhaps, to the complexity of a literary relationship much discussed but still, over thirty-five years after Millicent Bell's pioneering study, often simplistically misunderstood.

The convolutions of James's later prose, to be sure, are easily misconstrued, and one may excuse Wharton's sardonic response, in a letter reproduced here – "After being bracketed in Henry's article with Galsworthy and Hitchens . . . I feel that my niche in the Hall of Fame is in the most fashionable of its many mansions" – to an essay that in fact sets her apart favorably from her younger contemporaries. A series of

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letters disclosed by Lyall H. Powers makes clear James's enjoyment (contrary to Wharton's recollections in *A Backward Glance*) of *The Custom of the Country*, which he turns out to have admired no less highly, it seems, than the novel usually considered her most "Jamesian," *The Reef*. His famous epistolary analysis of that novel — a letter so often taken as indicating a capacity to appreciate, or even to comprehend, fiction composed along the lines only of James's own — appears in a fresh perspective when reread, as it now can be for the first time, in the context of the entire sequence. Another hitherto unpublished letter amplifies the praise that James expressed on other occasions for *Ethan Frome*, "so beautifully done, so *sustenu*, such a feat of artistic and imaginative projection." Already in 1904, before *The House of Mirth*, James is following Wharton's development with great interest; her third collection of stories "confirmed me so in my strong sense of your wise and witty art & your real practice of the Mystery"; regarding a later collection, at a time when he is pleading to other writers among his friends an inability to read any new fiction at all, James writes, "Beseech you to kindly send me Tales of Men [and Ghosts]. I want so awfully to see how you do it." Wharton may have continued saluting him as "Cher Maître," but James, after his early letters of experienced advice and encouragement, quickly comes to address her more as a full equal and colleague than as the imitative disciple so many critics, at the time and later, complained of so often. Take, for example, the remarkable letter of January 7, 1908, in which James readily turns over to Wharton, as the *donnée* for a possible story, an anecdote shared with her some time earlier, rehearsing at considerable length certain technical possibilities and concluding, "Ah, how I *understand* the necessity for you of a Fellow-critic!" If these letters are any indication, Wharton's works consistently escape, for the most part, the constraining formal expectations that James brought to bear on novels by some of his other acquaintances at the time. Doctrinaire and unwavering as he could appear on the subject of craft, James seems in fact to have enjoyed with Wharton a rare sense of reciprocity and mutual comprehension. One of the many disruptions in her private life leads him to declare, "For 'us,' & for our genius the act of attestation of the life of the mind and the play of that genius is by itself a sovereign help, a condition indispensable." And one registers the gratefulness with which James predicts, as he assesses yet another domestic complication, that "you will see and feel what I mean — being about the only person who ever does, in general."

At some point, however, James's authority in matters of form, enabling as it must have been at first, obviously being to discomfort the younger writer struggling to arrive at and explore her own voice. Her own letters, preceding the establishment of their friendship, already illus-

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trate Wharton's determination to distance herself from his achievement. The appearance of *The Sacred Fount* leads her to declare to Sara Norton, "(I wish so fine a title had not been attached to so ignoble a book.) . . . I could cry over the ruins of such a talent." To William C. Brownell, her guide in the world of letters, Wharton repeatedly expresses her disenchantment. She closes one letter with the postscript, "Don't ask me what I think of the Wings of the Dove," notes irreverently in another, soon after meeting him again, that "Mr. James . . . talks, thank heaven, more lucidly than he writes," and complains as early as 1904 that "the continued cry that I am an echo of Mr. James (whose books of the last ten years I can't read, much as I delight in the man) . . . makes me feel rather hopeless." One of the many ironies of their relationship is the fact that James befriended Wharton just as his works seemed no longer approachable to her, even as reviewers persisted in associating hers with his influence. What the Scribner's selection amply demonstrates, among other things, is in fact an almost immediate and increasing critical and creative independence, on Wharton's part, from the Jamesian example.

By the same token, to continue speaking of her work specifically in connection with James, even on its behalf, is thus to keep Wharton within the shadow she sought so early on to evade, and helps perpetuate a myth that Powers's volume, with its somewhat misleading title, inadvertently reinforces. While she saved nearly all of the letters she received from James, only a few of Wharton's survived the bonfires at Lamb House; of the one hundred eighty items appearing in *Henry James and Edith Wharton: Letters, 1900-1915*, fully one hundred sixty-seven are from one of the correspondents, thereby leaving the reader to infer, as best one can, the other side of a rich, ongoing dialogue. Given its lopsided contents, in other words, Wharton's voice is unavoidably silenced in such a volume, where she is forced to take once again the backseat to James, as she has so often – at least until recently – in the prevailing critical outlook on her work. Powers, to be sure, has been associated throughout his career far more with James's work, and it is to James that his accomplishment here performs an obvious service, not only presenting around one hundred thirty letters never before in print but also retrieving nearly a dozen hitherto accessible only in Percy Lubbock's selection of 1920. His volume, therefore, would have been important even if only for helping to correct at least this part of the arbitrary disorder in which James's correspondence has been left by Leon Edel – here the addressee, ironically, of a rather eye-popping dedication. Unfortunately, Powers has paid his Master the dubious additional tribute of emulating, to some extent, the editorial peculiarities that played such havoc with the four-volume selection of James's letters assembled some years ago by Edel. A volume this significant surely could have been spared more than half a

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dozen misprints or garbled transcriptions, not to mention a reference to a non-existent letter of August 3, 1908, as well as a number of inconsistencies; Wharton's *A Motor-Flight Through France* appears once with its hyphen and three times without it, while the private diary that she addressed to Fullerton is referred to variously as "The Life Apart" and as *A Life Apart*. One footnote identifies Chateaubriand as "author of *Le Genie du christianisme*" – hardly one of the works by which he would be quickly recognizable to English-speaking readers – while another suggests euphemistically that Colette "initially wrote in collaboration with Willy, the pseudonym of her first husband," who of course published as his own name the novels that he essentially compelled his wife to write.

References to several friends and events, some of them quite cryptic, are not explained – leaving unintelligible, for instance, Lubbock's rather mysterious movements in 1913-14, or the brief and nasty swipe James takes at "Vernon Lee" (identified only as "an English novelist whom HJ had known for thirty years"). Powers is not above the irrelevant insinuation—why bother pointing out that Raymond Recouly, who smoothed her path to the front in 1915, was "fourteen years EW's junior?"—and he also might have reordered some of his editorial priorities; he nowhere refers to Wharton's review of the Lubbock edition of James's letters and twice identifies "The Younger Generation" without mentioning its remarks on her work, but he can find room for as many as fifteen separate annotations of the nicknames of Wharton's automobile.

The lacunae are fewer in the Lewises' volume, which manages to be about as representative of its subject as one could reasonably hope or expect of a selection of less than one-tenth of the letters extant. A good many of the myriad facets of Wharton's character are captured here with considerable success, reflecting her wide and miscellaneous intellectual interests, her abiding concern with matters of form and aesthetic technique, as well as the inveterate sophistication and refinement remarkable in a woman largely self-educated under circumstances, and from within a particular social background, that would have permanently stifled a less determined sensibility. Only one letter reproduced here precedes Wharton's publishing life, so that the Scribner's volume documents only in retrospect the rather discouraging odds against which Wharton must have struggled in finding her way into expressiveness. The letters that she sent during the war, and the moving and widely noted surprise of her long-lost correspondence with the abominable Fullerton, convey a strong and sympathetic humanity balancing other traits even less attractive than one might already have gathered from her essays and later fiction—her rather alarming notions of race and ethnicity, for example, or the reflexive contempt in which she held all forms of organized benevolence, or the narrowing of her critical and artistic tastes, or the increasing

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reactionary crankiness, on the whole, of her later years. The imaginer of Lily Bart and the Bunner sisters—the unsparing anatomizer of old New York and "new money," of aristocratic Europe and Gilded-Age America—is also capable here of exchanging complaints about the reliability of servants, of condescending unbearably to the socialism of a fifty-year-old Upton Sinclair, and of crooning to Kenneth Clark's wife, at the height of the Great Depression, that "if the old plutocratic times would only return, how thrilling it would be to subvention some scholarly young man to do a book on Renaissance glass. . . !" The Scribner's selection forces us to acknowledge, alongside the heroically self-created Wharton, a Wharton most of us would prefer to overlook, and that can have only a salutary effect on our understanding of the many contradictions and anomalies of her character. Both volumes help enhance an ongoing Wharton resurgence that discloses to us—as in the case of so many other lately reclaimed writers among women—a figure far more complex and mercurial than the one familiar to us from decades of patronizing reductions.

FREDERICK WEGENER

A Polish Intellectual

MY CENTURY. THE ODYSSEY OF A POLISH INTELLECTUAL. By Aleksander Wat. With a Foreword by Czeslaw Milosz. Translated by Richard Lourie. University of California Press. $45.00.
WITH THE SKIN. POEMS OF ALEKSANDER WAT. Translated and edited by Czeslaw Milosz and Leonard Nathan. The Ecco Press. $17.95.

More than twenty years after his death, Aleksander Wat looms large not merely as one of the most important Polish poets of this century but as an author who still has an exceptionally urgent message to convey. His life, which coincided with the first two-thirds of our century (1900-1967), is a study in contrasts. It included such disparate experiences as a childhood spent devouring books in a well-to-do Jewish family in Warsaw and an old age spent in exile; early prominence as an outrageous Futurist poet and later expertise in the semantics of communism; a position as a fellow-traveler in the 1930s and time served in numerous Soviet prisons in the 1940s; years of brilliance as a poet, editor, and translator, and years of prolonged attacks of unbearable physical pain, which finally pushed him to suicide.

The farther we are from Wat's death, the more light the beacon of

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his work seems to send us. His poetry has recently been undergoing a rapid critical reevaluation, and it has been a model for many younger Polish (and American) poets, as numerous poems dedicated to his memory attest. More importantly, since Wat's death no less than six new volumes of his work have been brought out by Polish emigré publishers. The first to appear was the volume of his collected poems, composed by Wat himself in a reversed chronological order and featuring numerous poems from his late phase; this was followed by the original version of *My Century*, two huge volumes of Wat's recorded conversations with Czeslaw Milosz; finally, three volumes of Wat's collected prose came out, containing pieces that, for the most part, were previously unknown.

In the United States, Wat was represented, until very recently, by a single, slim collection, *Mediterranean Poems*, translated by Milosz and published by Ardis Press in 1977. The translations included there, now greatly rewritten and complemented with twenty-one new titles translated jointly by Milosz and Leonard Nathan, form the bulk of *With the Skin*. Its publication was preceded by the appearance of *My Century* in English translation – Wat's "spoken memoir," something between a book-length interview and an enormous monologue spurred by incisive questions from Milosz. The dedication with which Milosz over the years has promoted the oeuvre of his older friend and fellow poet in both Polish and American literary circles deserves a special note here, even more so as these two poets' respective styles differ so much: this is indeed a striking example of the attraction of opposites.

In the highly illuminating dialogue on Wat, provided by the translators as a sort of supplement to the poems themselves, Milosz says that Wat could be compared to Saul Bellow's hero, Mr. Sammler, if Mr. Sammler wrote poetry. But thinking of Wat, another literary character can't help but come to mind: Marsyas, the protagonist of "Apollo and Marsyas," a poem by another eminent contemporary Polish author, Zbigniew Herbert. For Herbert, the real duel between the lyre-playing god Apollo and the flutist-shepherd Marsyas starts *after* their musical duel, as a result of which Marsyas was flayed. Apollo, who won the first round, is defeated in the second: what defeats him is Marsyas's howl of unbearable pain that turns a nightingale into stone and makes a tree turn gray-haired. Nature understands real suffering better than the corrupt judges do.

Wat, a twentieth-century Marsyas, suffered unbearable pain for about fifteen years. It began with a fateful stroke he had as a consequence of a particularly heated meeting of the Polish Writers' Union in Warsaw in 1953. Direct physical causes aside, Wat also interpreted his affliction as a providential punishment for his prewar flirtation with communism. It is fascinating to trace this line of reasoning in his "spoken memoir" as well

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as in his other work.

In "Ode III," a fragment of which gives *With the Skin* its title, the painful process of experiencing the world "with my skin" is presented in several stages. Wat views his own poetry as born out of the sensations felt by his skin – both the skin of someone who immerses himself in the ecstatic joy of love and *gaya scienza* and the lacerated, pitiful, humiliated skin of a sacrificial animal. Both skins are, at the same time, individual and social: the skin of the dancer and lover communicates his intimate joy to others, that of the defenseless offering issues a warning to others by signalling his inner pain.

Wat is one of the few authors who indeed seem to write "with their skin." Yet his poetry is also highly intellectual and philosophical. This only *appears* to be a contradiction. The brain, after all, is also part of the body. In Wat's writing, the subtlest distinctions of the mind are tested by being translated into the language of the tactile sensations of pleasure and pain. Before World War II, Wat's chief artistic purpose was a variously conceived defense of individual freedom. His first volume of poetic prose was one of the most daring explorations of the limits of freedom in modern literature. In his collection of short stories, *Lucifer Unemployed* (of which an American translation is underway), historically-established ideas, notions, and psychological truths are treated in a way that borders on paradoxical, thus laying bare all the fragility of our understanding of the world. Subsequently, after the *caesura* of Wat's pro-communist sympathies, came the crucial experience of his life: years of imprisonment and persecution in the Soviet Union. Wat returned to Warsaw in 1946 with a burning desire to reveal the truth about communism, about the atrocities committed by an inhumane system in the name of universal good and happiness. But he found no ready audience. His compatriots' endurance had been worn thin by the years of Nazi occupation, and everyone seemed reconciled to the fact that the Soviets were the winners. With the noose of socialist realism's cultural monopoly constantly tightening around his neck, Wat abandoned his mission and stopped writing altogether. He made ends meet by translating Russian literature, Dostoevsky in particular. Wat's thoughts on communism's atrocities borrowed from Western literature that dealt with cruelty. In *My Century* he observes:

> In my early youth there was a long period when I delighted in reading the literature of cruelty from Lewis's *The Monk* to O. Mirbeau's *The Torture Garden*: evidently, in my readings I'd consumed my portion of sadism, and the world of Soviet tortures bored me like a hackneyed novel . . . Suffering which had an end to it seemed bearable to

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me.

This subject is further elaborated in his *Diary without Vowels*. Much more personal than *My Century*, the diary (so far available only in Polish) was originally written in Wat's own code that, like a Hebrew text, omitted vowels. An entry from 1965 offers an interesting argument about the increasing trivialization of cruelty in the contemporary world. Wat begins with culture, pointing out the differences between exemplary works such as *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* on the one hand and the prose of Michel Leiris on the other. He proceeds to politics and notes "the trivialization that the genocide of ancient Asian empires underwent in the concentration camps of Hitler and Stalin." In another entry, which begins by discussing the role of rhyme in poetry, Wat arrives at a distinction between the two forms of modern genocide. According to him, Hitler's genocide could be interpreted as Dionysian, Stalin's as Apollonian:

> Pock-marked, disgusting Stalin as Apollo! An apparently shocking comparison. One forgets about the Apollo who flayed Marsyas alive. But readers of the Holy Scripture realize that this Apollo presages Apollyon, the spirit of darkness.

One cannot help thinking of Aleksander Wat as a twentieth-century Marsyas. His suffering was a self-imposed curse for having once been too close, skin to skin, to the ideology and system he later considered the greatest illness of our (and his) century.

JAN ZIELINSKI

Paul Bowles

A WORLD OUTSIDE: THE FICTION OF PAUL BOWLES. By Richard F. Patteson. University of Texas Press. $18.95.
AN INVISIBLE SPECTATOR: A BIOGRAPHY OF PAUL BOWLES. By Christopher Sawyer-Lauçanno. Weidenfeld & Nicolson. $24.95.

The recent appearance of two books on the life and work of Paul Bowles, and the nature of the responses they have generated, should go a

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long way in securing a place in twentieth-century American literary history for this enigmatic and fascinating figure. From his birth on Long Island in 1910 his wanderings have taken him to Virginia, Paris, Berlin, Latin America, Sri Lanka and Morocco (where he lives today), and brought him in contact with a cast of modern musicians, writers, painters and social gadflies including the likes of Gertrude Stein, Aaron Copland, Tennessee Williams, Barbara Hutton, Salvador Dali, and Mick Jagger. It is difficult to think of a life which embodies and reflects the major impulses of this century more fully than Bowles's. Distaste for modern society, skepticism about most cultural forms of authority, and a relentless search for the differentiating experience have powerfully propelled him. The life itself would be of considerable interest even had he not produced a number of fine musical compositions, four novels, and more than sixty stories.

Any reader of Bowles enters an utterly distinctive world where American travelers to exotic lands fall prey to disease, psychological disintegration, and local terror; where the unconscious world, psychologically disrupted by drugs or other phenomenon, impinges on and often consumes the rational; where sexual desires often find their satisfaction in social and sanctified configurations; where man is adrift in his endless quest to piece together some kind of meaning. Whether the medium be words or notes, Bowles consistently has created aesthetically pleasing forms. Probably best-known for his novel *The Sheltering Sky* (1949), which Bertolucci has recently transformed into film, Bowles also has written and published more than sixty short stories, which Gore Vidal claims "are among the best ever written by an American."

Richard F. Patteson's *A World Outside* is without question the best full-length study of Bowles's fiction to date. Patteson, while being at times theoretical, never loses sight of the stories and novels he is discussing. Appropriately he acknowledges that the major fact affecting Bowles's art has been his "disinclination to live in (and for the most part, even to write about) the country of his origin." This decision, Patteson contends, "stamps his art with an indelible mark." From this initial observation, Patteson moves to look at what he terms "the related issues of shelter and exposure, interiority and exteriority" which give the fiction its "distinctive form." Noting that Bowles's characters frequently leave "safe" environments and put themselves in "dangerous" situations, Patteson tells us that they do so in order to "challenge the dominance of the outside world – not to surrender to it."

In his readings of all four published novels (*The Sheltering Sky, Let It Come Down, The Spider's House* and *Up Above the World*) and a good many stories such as "A Delicate Prey," "Pages from Cold Point," and "Kitty," Patteson draws our attention to the significance of architectural

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and social structures such as walls, families, and networks of acquaintances which enclose us and from which we seek to escape, drawing upon the theories of Gaston Bachelard, who emphasizes "the human need to come back to an imaginative sense of the primal house" and yet also "insists on the house's fragility." By concentrating on the metaphorical in Bowles, Patteson is able at once to preserve the integrity of the works and point to their deeper philosophical and psychological content.

Story-telling itself, Patteson reminds us, is one of the ways by which we construct and maintain structures in an attempt to ward off the terror of disorder. In his chapter entitled "The Shapes of Bowles' Fictions" Patteson carefully examines and draws meaning from the various narrative patterns in Bowles's work. The conclusion he comes to, consistent with Bowles's statements, is that the whole idea of "safety" is merely a powerful illusion we dangerously live by.

While Bowles aficionados would no doubt be inclined to welcome the attention a biography brings to the artist, they might have wished to wait longer for a fuller, more considered treatment of the subject than that given in Christopher Sawyer-Lauçanno's *An Invisible Spectator: A Biography of Paul Bowles*. Major deficiencies and errors in the biography might stem from Bowles's uncooperative stance. "I hope no biography will be written during my lifetime," Bowles wrote to his then would-be biographer, and he has insisted upon calling the work "unassisted" and "synthetic."

Our disappointment with Sawyer-Lauçanno's biography springs from the impression that so many opportunities have been missed. So many intriguing questions remain in our mind as we put down the book. What have been the major forces which have kept Bowles on the move? What narrative and thematic threads hold the life together? What effects have his various personal encounters had on his artistic development? What choices and sacrifices has he made with artistic goals in mind? Where does Bowles and his work fit into the twentieth century?

The biography often seems to be little more than a rewriting of Bowles's autobiography, *Without Stopping*, which some of the author's friends have facetiously referred to as *Without Telling*. One can read the autobiography and the biography side by side, as I did, and feel that the primary difference between them is that the new biography is devoid of wit and stylistically inferior. Without Bowles's autobiography, Sawyer-Lauçanno would have been at a complete loss.

There are a few things which can be said for Sawyer-Lauçanno's biography. He does, toward the beginning of the book, try to shed some light on Bowles's youthful literary influences, pointing specifically to Arthur Machen, Gide, Poe, and Surrealists such as Breton. The biography also contains a number of previously unpublished letters from

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some of Bowles's friends (for example, Bruce Morrisette, Ned Rorem, Daniel Burns, and Virgil Thomson), some of which help us come to know more about the inner nature of our subject. The range of sources Sawyer-Lauçanno has made use of, however, is simply inadequate. The holes are glaringly evident. Either Sawyer-Lauçanno didn't bother to look up the people he should have talked to or they wouldn't talk to him. Where is Gore Vidal? Or long-time friend and fellow Tangier resident Gavin Lambert? Or Joseph McPhillips, head of the American School in Tangier? Daniel Halperin? The Honorable David Herbert? Leonard Bernstein? Or Phillip Ramey, an American composer who has spent considerable time with Mr. Bowles in Tangier?

We shall have to wait for the biography which Bowles deserves. It is hard to imagine that future biographers will not be attracted to such an enigmatic and alluring figure. This first biography leaves much to be done by successors. The greatest value of Sawyer-Lauçanno's book, perhaps, is that its publication has drawn considerable attention to Bowles and his work. Given the controversial nature of Bowles's subject matter and his life (which tend to make of him a scapegoat or an idol), it is little wonder that his reputation is still unresolved. Some, evidently, are still wondering whether Bowles is as good as he is said to be. We should keep in mind that other American writers, such as Melville, Poe and Whitman, with whom Bowles has affinities, have seen their reputations go up and down and around the roller-coaster of criticism before finally reaching a position of relative equilibrium. It may take more time for the dust to settle in order for us to see Bowles's art and life in an objective light.

ALLEN HIBBARD

The Pugnacity Syndrome

CONTINGENCY, IRONY, AND SOLIDARITY. By Richard Rorty. Cambridge University Press. $10.95.
REPRESENTATION AND REALITY. By Hilary Putnam. M.I.T. Press. $19.95.

Richard Rorty and Hilary Putnam are two of the dominant figures in contemporary American philosophy. While Putnam has flourished at Harvard, gradually growing in stature until he moved easily into the gap created by W.V. Quine's retirement, Rorty was catapulted into national

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prominence when his move from Princeton to the University of Virginia was accompanied by one of the prestigious five-year MacArthur fellowships. Both now contribute to public discourse by opposing currently popular intellectual fashions, pugnacity in the case of Rorty and scientific realism in the case of Putnam.

The United States has for decades been dominated by a fashionable fallacy that might be called a "Pugnacity Syndrome," since its first response to a dissident or trouble-maker is to drive out, beat down, or beat up the alien or unwholesome opposing element. The pugnacity is normally moralized through a self-righteous indignation at the *evil* of the Other, but intractable opposition is the defining characteristic. We see this syndrome at work not only in Reagan's characterization of the Soviet Union as the "Evil Empire," but also in the epidemic of litigation and incarceration, the enormous popularity of zero-sum sports (both amateur and professional), the inviolability (practical undiscussibility) of the Pentagon budget, and the dependence on armed force as the mainstay of foreign policy – all of which consume vast resources, exclude dialogue, and reject cooperative or integrative strategies. High time for a critique.

Pugnacity is more of an intellectual problem than one might think. Each instance has its rationalization, phrased in terms of necessity, practicality, prudence, rights, and so on. Traditional wisdom distinguishes between valid and invalid ("rationalizing") justifications, but in practice relativism dominates: local and cultural variations override any consensus. The mainstream of contemporary philosophy in both Europe and America, culminating in "postmodernism," suggests that the notions of truth and justice are altogether too vulnerable to sustain the weight of brutality and hardship that is thereby put upon them – indeed to sustain any weight at all. They are vulnerable because each claim about truth or justice must make some presuppositions, which (at some point) cannot be justified. Since reliance on any justification whatever reduces to reliance on some unexamined dogmatism, there can be no distinction between valid and invalid justifications. Such contemporary criticism undermines rationalizations for brutality by undermining all claims for justice, effectively equating pugnacity and authority. Waldenfels' *Ordnung im Zwielicht* is a fine recent European exposition of this view.

Traditional philosophical thought would propose some distinctions to reinstate judgments between valid and invalid justifications of force and coercion. Rorty, however, opts for the more radical alternative. He concurs with the postmodernist dogma that the only way to avoid rationalizations is to give up the "pretense" of justifying actions and beliefs, and proposes a liberal ideology that dispenses with "justifications" altogether. The core idea of Rorty's liberalism is the definition (adopted

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from Judith Shklar) "that liberals are people who think that cruelty is the worst thing we do." Compassion (or solidarity) thereby replaces truth or justice as the central public virtue.

Rorty presents irony, unlike solidarity, as a private rather than a public virtue – doing so, ironically, in the context of a public book. The "ironism" he advocates "results from awareness of the power of redescription." Redescription – Goodman and Elgin advocate something similar in *Reconceptions in Philosophy* (Hackett 1988) – is the ironist's alternative to knowledge and truth, truth being no more viable than justice for postmodernism. Rorty's liberalism, unlike Hayek's, is sustained by *hope* rather than by truth and justice. It is a strength of Rorty's view that his irony is not at all cynical; ironism undermines and replaces knowledge-claims about truth and justice, but cynicism is not allowed to impugn hope. Another strength is his acknowledgment that the abuses of irony can be as grave as the abuses of metaphysics; hence the stress on gentleness and solidarity.

While the sustained articulate rejection of pugnacity is attractive, the abandonment of *knowledge* is not. It results from a lingering Cartesian fallacy. Descartes noticed that his senses could *sometimes* deceive him and concluded that they could *never* be reliable. The hidden premise of this inference is that knowing anything requires knowing everything. Simone de Beauvoir made the best possible use of this philosophical absurdity when she remarked, "To *know* anything you must know everything, but to *say* anything you must leave out a great deal." Like Descartes and de Beauvoir, Rorty has noticed that justifications come to an end in something taken for granted (that is, unjustified) and infers that this obvious fact impugns every justification, and hence every knowledge-claim. This conclusion leaves him in sharp contrast to Wittgenstein and Putnam. It is curious that this eloquent apostle for postmodernism should remain so inextricably entangled in such a long-discredited Cartesian premise.

The scientific realism that Putnam refutes is a type of reductionism he formerly advocated. It holds that the only thing real about beliefs, meanings, intentions, and so forth is what can be represented in terms of some present or forseeable scientific theory. The currently fashionable forms of scientific realism, which dominate artificial intelligence and cognitive science generally, employ Turing machines or some other computational model of the brain, all thoughts then being reduced to brain-states, and all meaning to thoughts. Putnam's critique of this view (of his former self) is extraordinarily clear for such technical subject-matter. It is extraordinarily convincing too. One of the many fine passages (116-118) derives, as an extension of Gödel's famous work in mathematics, the general conclusion "that reason can go beyond whatever reason can formalize," a point which seems sufficient in itself to

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refute scientific realism but on which Putnam relies very lightly.

Besides Gödel, Putnam relies heavily on a doctrine of "meaning holism," made famous by Quine, which involves interrelations not only among the meanings of the various words in a language but also between meanings and beliefs. Meanings, therefore, cannot be isolated from changes and challenges (as Plato and Kant thought); they depend on our evolving physical and social environment. These considerations demolish the mentalism (all meaning being reduced to thoughts) that forms part of scientific realism.

The relativism entailed by our having different physical and social environments threatens every sort of realism; but Putnam does not give in. He proposes a pragmatic (or "internal") realism in which relativity of meaning and cognition is compatible with objectivity. The objectivity can, of course (because of Gödel), no longer be defined in scientific terms – not even those of any forseeable science. This view therefore stands in sharp contrast to the scientific realism still fashionable in the universities as well as to the antirealism of Rorty. Quite an achievement.

NEWTON GARVER

Writers on Art

REPORTED SIGHTINGS: ART CHRONICLES, 1957-1987. By John Ashbery. Alfred A. Knopf. $35.00.
JUST LOOKING: ESSAYS ON ART. By John Updike. Alfred A. Knopf. $35.00.

In 1984, the exhibition "Van Gogh in Arles" at the Metropolitan Museum of Art was all the rage. Painter Trevor Winkfield told me that he ran into John Ashbery soon after and had asked how he had liked the show. "It's okay, if you like great art," said the poet in a characteristically droll style. His drollery, however, is as innocent as three-dimensional chess.

With humor that put distance between himself and major cultural institutions, Ashbery revealed an aspect of his personality that remains true of his writing on art. He is positively attracted by modest, even minor, talent. To be acquainted with Ashbery himself is to learn that while his poetry is often ambitious and his lifetime achievement great, he professes nonchalance in his own creative life and is most comfortable with unheroic stances in others. When it comes to art writing, a field that

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earned him a living while writing poetry, Ashbery's defense of the minor artist is bound up with a sense of his own modest claims of authority. At bottom, he realizes he is a poet writing on art, not an art critic proper.

Reported Sightings is a selection of Ashbery's writings on art published during the last thirty years, starting with a weekly column for the Paris *Herald-Tribune* and leading to assignments as "a sort of art critic," for *ArtNews*, *Newsweek* and *New York*. From the first, Ashbery chose what suited his taste and wrote in whatever relaxed manner pleased him. With fewer constraints placed on him than on most journalists, Ashbery, moreover, was at liberty to follow his own literary impulse, and given the roots of his own poetry in Symbolism and Surrealism, it is no wonder he consistently favored painting totally at odds with – and even oblivious to – the formalist modernity derived from Cubism as espoused by the art critic Clement Greenberg.

Consequently, if Ashbery's offhand impressionistic art appreciation is a pleasurable read that informs us about his esthetic. That is to say, he prefers language simple in its constituent parts, that is yet intricate and fantastic in its assembly. It is telling, for instance, that in a column written for *New York* magazine Ashbery once followed a lead review on the visionary architect Giovanni Battista Piranesi with one on the Surrealist poet and painter Henri Michaux, for he considered Piranesi father of the *malaise* to which Michaux succumbed. Complication is Ashbery's special delight: he was disappointed that sheets of dungeons were rare among the architect's many benign landscapes, while he took pleasure in the ink drawings by Michaux, whose mescaline-induced pictographic fields breed the kind of space that refuted rationality. Ashbery's own poetic space often seems as though Michaux were describing it: "I want my tracings to be the very phrasing of life, but flexible, but deformable, sinuous."

Structures rife with irrational internal relationships are as characteristic of Ashbery's poetry as what follows is not: in painting Ashbery much prefers representational to abstract art. Of his group, not all artists are, strictly speaking, illustrative in line or syntax, although conservative draftsmanship is plentiful in Chirico – perhaps his favorite painter: Fairfield Porter is a Yankee Nabi, while Jennifer Bartlett and Joe Shannon are illustrators without apology. But he is fully aware that this antimodernist taste is a weakness that casts doubt on his own claims as a modernist. In a review of "Fantastic British Book Illustration and Design" he says, "Illustration is one of the most discredited genres of art. The trouble is, we all like it." He thus concedes a failing as a writer about art that could not tempt him as an avant-garde poet.

If *Just Looking* by John Updike is minor, it is not for lack of a major talent. This book touches on the art and reputations of the illustrious

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Impressionists plus a few far-flung Romantics like Fuseli and realist illustrators like Wyeth. The most palpable presence, however, is that of Updike himself. Author of the appreciations collected here, Updike is an eminent novelist whose book reviews of literature appearing in *The New Yorker* are known for their scrupulous, intricate attention to the language and craft of other writers. These writings on art, presented as a glossy picture book, albeit in a format modest for such merchandise, signify their origins in glossy magazines, and indeed they were published initially in *Art and Antiques*, *Realities, Travel and Leisure,* and *Vanity Fair*, as well as in the ever more popular *New York Times Book Review*. While the jacket copy tells us that Updike attended art school, the collection we have here is clearly by someone writing outside his field of expertise – although we know that for the purpose of selling glossy magazines lack of expertise doesn't matter.

Neither art criticism nor art history but rather sensuous pleasantries on pictures are proffered here. *Just Looking* opens – appropriately enough for such a mild diversion by a celebrated novelist – with "What MoMA Done Tole Me," a reminiscence by Updike on being introduced to the world of art as a child. Here, Updike recalls the painting that first attracted him, and why, and in so doing, confesses his personal tastes. (His youthful preference for Gris over Picasso stemmed from a repugnance with Picasso's "carnal" approach to art: "Picasso seemed a bit too noisy, too bustling and carnal, for my hagiology, but there was a painting by fellow Spaniard and Cubist Juan Gris which I often contemplated with reverance." That painting was *Breakfast*, which, compared with Bonnard's composition on the same subject "*tastes* more like breakfast.") Elegant sensuality is one of Updike's preferences, for crudity of style implies violence in Updike's anthropomorphized understanding of form.

Several short essays follow. These brief themes typically featuring a single painting range across time and space. Yet they commonly link optical refinement and decorum and include *Telephone Booths* by the contemporary photo-realist artist Richard Estes to *View of Deficit* by the seventeenth-century master of the *camera obscura*, Jan Vermeer. Longer essays, on Edwardian children's book illustration, Sargent, Renoir and Degas treat theme and career at leisure, yet often manage to drive a critical point home as well. The essay on Sargent, "Something Missing," is typical of these more probing pieces. Written for *The New Republic*, it confronts the superficiality of Sargent's fashionable manner, even if it adds little to this safe judgment of the American expatriot.

Comparing Ashbery and Updike on Fairfield Porter reveals their cultural investment in his art as well as their disposition toward form. Ashbery, who calls Porter "perhaps the major American artist of this

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century," overesteems the esthetic significance of his art enormously, yet for Ashbery, in art the intellect filtered through down-home nonchalance counts much more than the agon of modernism. "Porter was, of course, only the latest of a series of brilliant know-nothings who at intervals have embodied the American genius, from Emerson to Thoreau to Whitman and Dickinson down to Wallace Stevens and Marianne Moore." He means they have no ideas that can be extracted from paint itself – a kind of art-for-art's sake that may be found in all sorts of canvases whether figurative or not. Updike, reviewing the retrospective of Porter's works mounted at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, for which Ashbery wrote a catalogue essay, remains unpersuaded: "It is hard not to feel, reading the forewards that Mr. Moffett and John Ashbery have written for the catalogue, that this earnest, cranky rich man's son was a bit patronized in the heady art circles of Manhattan and its exurban enclaves." For once, Updike distrusts decorum; being well-bred is not to be confused with esthetic rigor.

MARJORIE WELISH

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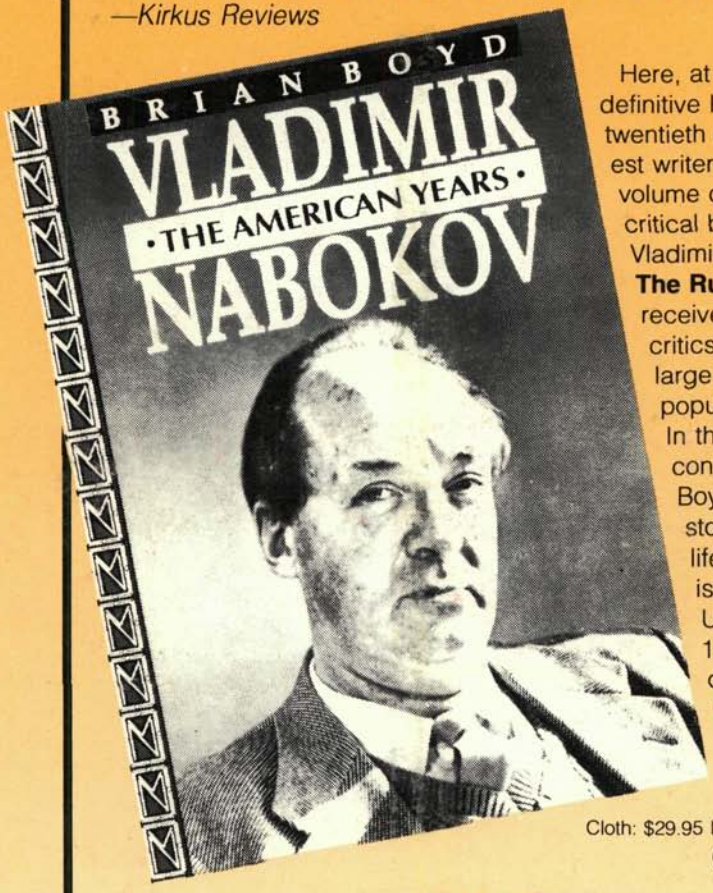

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